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MURRUMBIDGEE

An Australian Government Initiative

*Well People, Resilient Communities  
across the Murrumbidgee*

**Christmas Tree**  
of Remembrance Guide



# The Christmas Tree of Remembrance

The festive season, although filled with family, friends and celebration, can be a stressful time of year but when you are managing grief, it can be particularly challenging.

The Christmas Tree of Remembrance provides community members with an opportunity to write messages to family members and friends who have died, as a way to include them in the spirit of Christmas.

This ritual acknowledges the ongoing connection that we still have with those from whom we have lost. Rituals offer people a way to process and express their grief, while also providing a way for the community to support the bereaved. Rituals and customs can provide a sense of routine and normalcy in a time of confusion and loss.

A Christmas tree is set up in a public venue, such as a community centre or library, along with tags for messages and a pen. The position needs to be visible but also provide some privacy for people to sit and write their message on a tag. The activity can be promoted in the community by placing flyers on local notice boards and a small advertisement in a local newspaper or newsletter. The community is encouraged to come and write a message on a tag, and place it the tree, throughout the month of December.

After Christmas, the tree is dismantled and the tags gathered and counted. A small ritual is held to dispose of the tags. Some groups have honoured the sentiments in the tags by burying them under a tree in a local cemetery. Other community groups have burnt the tags /cards and scattered the ashes in a community garden setting or local place of remembrance. You may like to invite some community members to the spreading of the ashes and read out the poem included in this guide. You may also like to place a report in a local publication describing your community activity.

This community activity can be undertaken by any community group or committee as an annual event. This guide contains a number of resources that can be adapted by your community group.



## Resources in this guide:

- Christmas Tree of Remembrance set up information – print for your committee group members
- Example Letter seeking donation of a tree – copy and insert your details
- Flyer for community notice boards – copy, insert your details and print copies
- Sign / poster to be placed near tree – print page in A2 size and laminate
- Desk / table activity information sheet – print page and laminate one copy
- Tips for Coping handout for desk – print copies of this page
- Example poem 'I heard your voice in the wind today' – print copies for spreading of ashes ritual
- Example media release / report on the activity – copy and insert your details

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Palliative care Australia <https://palliativecare.org.au/youre-not-alone-tips-managing-grief-holidays>

Hume Palliative Care Consultancy Team Ovens and King Community Health Service 'Community Christmas Trees of Remembrance: A Guide' 2010

UK Funeral Guide <https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/blog/coping-grief-christmas>

Culcairn LHAC Christmas Tree of Remembrance, Culcairn Library 2019 (photo)

# Christmas Tree of Remembrance Set Up Information

## Explanation

Christmas is a difficult time for those who are grieving. The Christmas Tree of Remembrance is an opportunity for community members to include lost loved ones in the festive season.

## Resources

- Medium sized artificial Christmas Tree
- Star or Angel for top of Tree
- Tinsel string in Christmas colour (no lights, they can be a hazard)
- Christmas Gift Tags: need to be blank on reverse side for writing. Choose tags that are plain. Add a loop of ribbon so they can be hung on the tree, if they don't have one already.
- A small box to put the tags in, for the desk or table
- Laminated sign to put on a wall near the tree
- Handouts on 'Tips on coping with grief at Christmas' for table / desk
- Explanation sheet – laminated, sits on the table / desk (tape it down)
- Small table and chair
- Pen (s)
- Plastic tub with lid, to store all the resources for next year
- Pretty box or container, to place the ashes



## Location

- Ask an appropriate and well –frequented local venue if they would host the tree e.g. library or community centre
- Need a space in the venue that is visible but allows for a bit of privacy, for people writing messages
- Ask if facility they are able to loan you a small table and chair
- Seek permission to put up the sign on a wall or somewhere visible
- Explain you will call in periodically to check that the desk is tidy, pen is still there and there are still enough blank tags in the box
- Ask if they would like to host the tree each year

## Process

- Secure appropriate local venue and spot for the tree
- Buy resources or seek donation of resources
- In the last week of November, promote the activity locally e.g. newspaper, newsletters, and / or promote when tree is set up and ask local newspaper to come and do a story
- Late November, set up the tree, with all resources. Include an acknowledgement, if tree donated.
- Community members visit throughout December, write messages to their loved ones and hang the tags on the tree
- Periodically check on the area throughout December, to make sure the area is tidy, pen is still there and there are enough tags available
- Early January, collect all the tags from the tree and count them. Pack up the tree and resources and store in the tub for next year.
- Burn the tags together. Often there is a high fire danger at this time of year, so you can use a BBQ with a lid and burn in a foil tray. Gather the ashes and put into small container that is kept for this purpose.
- Scatter the ashes somewhere appropriate, in remembrance of those lost. Some members of your community may like to participate in this. You may have a local remembrance garden or something similar for this purpose.
- Report to your committee / community group; number of messages written, when and where the ashes were spread.
- Adapt this process to suit your local community needs.

## Example letter seeking donation of a tree

(Insert date)

(Insert organisation name e.g. Kmart)

(Insert Address)

To the Manager,

As preparations to celebrate Christmas and the festive season are underway, we are reminded that for some people the season can be difficult, especially those who are remembering loved ones who have died. The Christmas Tree of Remembrance is a place where people may write a message on blank Christmas style tag or card, to their family members and friends who have died, as a way of including them in the spirit of Christmas.

This year, we are seeking the donation of a medium sized artificial Christmas tree, star and string of tinsel, so that we can commence the Christmas Tree of Remembrance at the (insert venue). If (insert organisation name) were able to accommodate our request, we would acknowledge your generous contribution in our signage at the (insert venue).

Thank you

Kind regards

**(Insert name of committee member)**

**(Insert committee or community group name)**

# Christmas Tree of Remembrance



We know that the festive season can be a difficult time for someone who has lost a loved one.

We invite you to come to the (insert venue) and write a message to your lost loved one, to include them in the spirit of Christmas. Hang your message on the Christmas Tree of Remembrance in their memory.

After Christmas, we will dismantle the Christmas Tree and a small ritual will be held to honour the memories contained in these messages.

**(Insert Community Group / Committee Name)**



# *Christmas Tree of Remembrance*



# Welcome to the Christmas Tree of Remembrance



We know that the festive season can be a difficult time for someone who has lost a loved one.

We invite you to write a message to your lost loved one, to include them in the spirit of Christmas. Hang your message on the Christmas Tree of Remembrance in their memory.

After Christmas, we will dismantle the Christmas Tree and a small ritual will be held to honour the memories contained in these messages.

(Insert name of committee / community group)



## Tips for coping with grief at Christmas

Facing your first Christmas without someone you love can be a very lonely and daunting time. There may be expectations that you will put up the Christmas tree, send out cards, go Christmas shopping and join family and friends for Christmas dinner...especially because others may wish to see you coping and moving on. But when you're grieving this can be really difficult. You may have no inclination or energy to 'pretend' that you are looking forward to Christmas when in truth you wish things were the way they were last year - when you were still together with your loved one.

On the other hand, some people want to handle Christmas time by doing things in the same way as always - not changing anything and keeping to the same routines and family rituals. Keeping to the familiar gives them comfort. It doesn't mean you've forgotten the person or that your grief for them is over.

Everyone handles their emotions and reactions differently. Here are some tips if you're facing the dilemma of how to handle this Christmas:

**1. Give yourself permission not to do the things that you're finding hard to do** - writing Christmas cards, putting up the tree, going to Christmas parties - it's alright to let these go this year or next, until you can cope with social events again.

**2. Make a point of remembering your loved one in a special way** - light a candle for them on Christmas Day, place an ornament on the Christmas tree to symbolise them, buy a gift for a needy child or family in place of the gift you would have bought.

**3. Allow yourself to grieve** - the days leading up to Christmas (and other significant days on the calendar) can heighten your grief. Seeing other couples and families together can hurt. Seeing the empty place at the Christmas table can be hard to bear. It's alright to cry and let people know that it's hard living without someone special. Now's the time to tell a close friend that you're struggling and that you'd appreciate their company or simply their listening ear for support.

If you know someone who is grieving this Christmas, give them a call, write them a special card, invite them over for a quiet get together, acknowledge their loss and have the courage to mention the name of their loved one ... and let them know that you understand that it may be an extra hard time for them because it's Christmas.

For more information and support contacts:

[https://palliativecare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/20151210\\_Tips-for-Managing-Grief-During-the-holidays\\_final.pdf](https://palliativecare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/20151210_Tips-for-Managing-Grief-During-the-holidays_final.pdf)





# *I heard your voice in the wind today*

*I heard your voice in the wind today  
and I turned to see your face;  
The warmth of the wind caressed me  
as I stood silently in place.  
I felt your touch in the sun today  
as its warmth filled the sky;  
I closed my eyes for your embrace  
and my spirit soared high.  
I saw your eyes in the window pane  
as I watched the falling rain;  
It seemed as each raindrop fell  
it quietly said your name.                      - Anon*

## Example Media Release / Report

### **(Insert Town Name) Remembrance Garden Event**

Members of the (insert name) community group / committee and community members gathered at the (insert venue name) on (insert January date) for special occasion that will now become an annual event.

A Christmas Tree of Remembrance was installed at (insert venue). This was in recognition of the fact that the festive season can be a difficult time for someone who has lost a loved one. Community members were invited to write a message to their lost loved one and to hang it on the tree, to include them in the spirit of Christmas.

After Christmas, the committee members gathered the messages and burnt them. The community then gathered to see them spread around the base of a rosemary bush, which was especially planted for the occasion. This was done to honour the memories contained in the messages. A bench seat will also be installed near the rosemary bush, to create a special place of remembrance, where community members will have a quiet place to sit and reflect on their lost loved ones.

A poem was read out to those present, while the ashes were scattered.

### **I heard your voice in the wind today**

*I heard your voice in the wind today*

*And I turned to see your face;*

*The warmth of the wind caressed me*

*As I stood silently in place.*

*I felt your touch in the sun today*

*As its warmth filled the sky;*

*I closed my eyes for your embrace*

*And my spirit soared high.*

*I saw your eyes in the window pane*

*As I watched the falling rain;*

*It seemed as each raindrop fell*

*It quietly said your name.*

*Anon*

