

Funeral Etiquette

If you are someone who has to plan a funeral due to the loss of a loved one, or perhaps you are attending a service for a family member or friend, here are some explanations of terms and situations you may find yourself having to address.

The funeral is a ceremony of proven worth and value for those who mourn. It provides an opportunity for the survivors and others who share in the loss to express their love, respect, grief and appreciation for a life that has been lived. It permits facing openly and realistically the crisis the death presents. Through the funeral the bereaved take that first step toward emotional adjustment to their loss. This information has been prepared as a convenient reference for modern funeral practices and customs.

THE FUNERAL SERVICE

The type of service conducted for the deceased is specified by the family. Funeral directors are trained to assist families in arranging whatever type of service they desire. The service, held either at a place of worship or at the funeral home with the deceased present, varies in ritual according to denomination. The presence of friends at this time is an acknowledgement of friendship and support. It is helpful to friends and the community to have an obituary notice published announcing the death and type of service to be held.

Private Service

This service is by invitation only and may be held at a place of worship, a funeral home or a family home. Usually, selected relatives and a few close friends attend the funeral service. Often public visitation is held, condolences are sent, and the body is viewed.

Memorial Service

A memorial service is a service without the body present and can vary in ceremony and procedures according to the community and religious affiliations. Some families prefer public visitations followed by a private or graveside service with a memorial service later at the church or funeral home.

PALLBEARERS

Friends, relatives, church members or business associates may be asked to serve as pallbearers. The funeral director will secure pallbearers if requested to do so by the family.

Honorary Pallbearers

When the deceased has been active in political, business, church or civic circles, it may be appropriate for the family to request close associates of the deceased to serve as honorary pallbearers. They do not actively carry the casket.

Eulogy

A eulogy may be given by a member of the family, clergy, a close personal friend or a business associate of the deceased. The eulogy is not to be lengthy, but should offer praise and commendation and reflect the life of the person who has died.

Dress

Wearing colorful clothing is no longer inappropriate for relatives and friends. Persons attending a funeral should be dressed in good taste so as to show dignity and respect for the family and the occasion.

Funeral Procession/Cortege

When the funeral ceremony and the burial are both held within the local area, friends and relatives may accompany the family to the cemetery. The procession is formed at the funeral home or place of worship. The funeral director can advise you of the traffic regulations and procedures to follow while driving in a funeral procession.

CONDOLENCES

The time of death is a very confusing time for family members. No matter what your means of expressing your sympathy, it is important to clearly identify yourself to the family.

Flowers

Sending a floral tribute is a very appropriate way of expressing sympathy to the family of the deceased. Flowers express a feeling of life and beauty and offer much comfort to the family. A floral tribute can either be sent to the funeral home or the residence. If sent to the residence, usually a planter or a small vase of flowers indicating a person's continued sympathy for the family is suggested. The florist places an identification card on the floral tribute. At the funeral home the cards are removed from the floral tributes and given to the family so they may acknowledge the tributes sent.

Mass Cards

Mass cards can be sent either by Catholic or non-Catholic friends. The offering of prayers is a valued expression of sympathy to a Catholic family. A card indicating that a Mass for the deceased has been arranged may be obtained from any Catholic parish. In some areas it is possible to obtain Mass cards at the funeral home. The Mass offering card or envelope is given to the family as an indication of understanding, faith and compassion. Make sure that your name and address is legible and that you list your postal code. This will make it easier for the family to acknowledge your gift.

Memorial Donations

A memorial contribution, to a specific cause or charity, can be appreciated as flowers. A large number of memorial funds are available, however the family

may have expressed a preference. Memorial donations provide financial support for various projects. If recognized as a charitable institution, some gifts may be deductible for tax purposes. Your funeral director is familiar with them and can explain each option, as well as furnish the donor with "In Memoriam" cards, which are given to the family.

Sympathy Cards

Sending a card of sympathy, even if you are only an acquaintance, is appropriate. It means so much to the family members to know they are in good thoughts. The card should be in good taste and in keeping with your relationship to the family of the deceased.

Personal Note

A personal note of sympathy is very meaningful. Express yourself openly and sincerely. An expression such as "I'm sorry to learn of your personal loss" is welcomed by the family and can be kept with other messages.

Telephone Calls

Speaking to a family member gives you an opportunity to offer your services and make them feel you really care. If they wish to discuss their recent loss, don't hesitate to talk to the person about the deceased. Be a good listener. Sending a telegram expressing your sympathy is also appropriate.

Visitation

Your presence at the visitation demonstrates that although someone has died, friends still remain. Your presence is an eloquent statement that you care.

Visitation provides a time and place for friends to offer their expression of sorrow and sympathy, rather than awkwardly approaching the subject at the office, supermarket or social activities. The obituary/death notice will designate the hours of visitation when the family will be present and will also designate the times when special services such as lodge services or prayer services may be held. Persons may call at the funeral home at any time during suggested hours of the day or evening to pay respects, even though the family is not present. Friends and relatives are requested to sign the register book. A person's full name should be listed e.g. "Mrs. John Doe". If the person is a business associate, it is proper to list their affiliation as the family may not be familiar with their relationship to the deceased.

Friends should use their own judgment on how long they should remain at the funeral home or place of visitation. If they feel their presence is needed, they should offer to stay.

When the funeral service is over, the survivors often feel very alone in dealing with their feelings. It is important that they know you are still there. Keep in touch.

Sympathy Expressions

When a person calls at the funeral home, sympathy can be expressed by clasping hands, an embrace, or a simple statement of condolence, such as:

"I'm sorry."

"My sympathy to you."

"It was good to know John."

"John was a fine person and a friend of mine. He will be missed."

"My sympathy to your mother."

The family member in return may say:

"Thanks for coming."

"John talked about you often."

"I didn't realize so many people cared."

"Come see me when you can."

Encourage the bereaved to express their feelings and thoughts, but don't overwhelm them.

Acknowledgements

The family should acknowledge the flowers and messages sent by relatives and friends. When food and personal services are donated, these thoughtful acts also should be acknowledged, as should the services of the pallbearers. The funeral director may have available printed acknowledgement cards which can be used by the family. When the sender is well known to the family, a short personal note should be written on the acknowledgment card expressing appreciation for a contribution or personal service received. The note can be short, such as:

"Thank you for the beautiful roses. The arrangement was lovely."

"The food you sent was so enjoyed by our family. Your kindness is deeply appreciated."

In some communities it is a practice to insert a public thank you in the newspaper. The funeral director can assist you with this.

Children at Funerals

At a very early age, children have an awareness of and a response to death. Children should be given the option to attend visitation and the funeral service. The funeral director can advise you on how to assist children at the time of a funeral and can provide you with additional information and literature.

Grief Recovery

It is healthy to recognize death and discuss it realistically with friends and relatives. When a person dies, there is grief that needs to be shared. Expressions of sympathy and the offering of yourself to help others following the funeral are

welcomed. It is important that we share our grief with one another. Your local funeral director can help family and friends locate available resources and grief recovery programs in your area.

HELP A GRIEVING FRIEND

Be a listener

Grieving people often find they need to talk about what's happened and how they feel about it. You don't have to fix their grief or cheer them up, but you can share the load just by being there to listen.

It's all right to cry

There's no need to say "be brave" or "be strong." Crying helps emotions to be released so they won't get bottled up. To give permission for tears, anger or any other emotions will let your friend know you aren't uncomfortable with their grief.

Stay in touch

Remember that grief doesn't go away in a few short weeks. Even one year may not be long enough to adjust to changes in your life. So, a friend who calls in 3, 6, or 12 months time may be one of the few who still asks how things are going. Special days like birthdays or Christmas may be just the time to pick up the phone and say, "I was thinking of you today."