

What happens after the ceremony?

You may be invited back to the family's home for a quiet reception. This is a time for friends and family to talk, reflect and share refreshments. It is a nice gesture to offer to bring food ahead of time for this gathering. Try to be specific in what you are offering so they don't feel like they are asking too much of you. For example say, "I would like to bring over a lasagna. Can I bring it on Wednesday?"

In the weeks following the ceremony, the family will be faced with the difficult task of resuming their lives. Your continued understanding and support will be very needed during this time. Try to keep in contact with them and allow them to go through the many stages of grieving. Continue to include them in your social plans, but don't be offended if they choose not to attend. If you think of them, send a kind note or continue to offer to help bring meals. Come over for a visit and be a shoulder to cry on.

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FUNERAL ETIQUETTE

A guide to thoughtful behavior.

When someone close to you loses a loved one or friend, your natural instinct is to help them in their time of grief. However, you may not know what to do or say which can leave you doing nothing or feeling insecure in your efforts. This is a guide to help you feel confident in your actions during this sensitive time.

How should I express my condolences?

Visit them.

If you have a close relationship with the grieving, there is no substitute for an in person visit. Your physical presence and support during a time of loss can be most comforting, however some would prefer to be alone so be sensitive to their wishes. In other cases, a visit may not be possible, in which case there are other ways to show your condolences.

Flowers.

A floral tribute is more than just a tradition. Flowers are symbolic of life and can be a simple reminder of beauty and life during a difficult time. You may send flowers to the funeral home or residence before the funeral. It is also appropriate to send flowers to the home after the funeral.

Most flowers are appropriate for a funeral flower arrangement, with only a few exceptions. If the family requests that flowers be omitted or that donations be made in lieu of the flowers, it is best to honor their request. Also, you should not send flowers to an Orthodox Jewish Funeral. They should also not be sent to a Catholic church. They can be sent to the funeral home, however.

Mass cards.

If the deceased was Catholic, you can send a mass card instead of or in addition to flowers. A mass card can be arranged for the deceased, which you can either mail or bring to the funeral.

Memorial gifts.

Gifts of remembrance are always welcomed and can be especially thoughtful. It is nice to personalize the gift in honor of the deceased or a charity in their honor. Ask one of our knowledgeable staff for ideas or recommendations of thoughtful memorial gifts.

Cards and notes.

Handwritten cards or notes are a thoughtful way to express your sympathies to the family of the deceased. Express your support and concern through kind words. Recall positive memories about the deceased and keep it light. Do not try to explain why death occurs or convince them of anything. Just offer support and encouragement. These cards and notes will be a lifeline to them during this time.

Phone calls.

If you are local, a visit is preferred, however if not, a phone call can be a thoughtful way to offer your support. Offer your services and condolences, but keep it brief. They may not feel like talking and may be busy with the arrangements.

Gifts for the family.

Food is one of the most practical needs you can meet at this time. The bereaved may not feel like keeping up with household chores and may have several people staying at their house. Pre-made meals in large portions are best suited for feeding the household. You can also offer to help with the kids or errands if they don't have other family around. It is also nice to think of the children during this time. A new toy or video may help keep their minds off of things while their parents grieve.

Money is not an appropriate gift unless it is an extremely difficult financial situation.

What about the funeral service?

The funeral service will differ based on the family's religious and personal beliefs. Most likely the service will be held at a funeral home, but it could be held at a church, temple, synagogue or the family's home.

Seating.

No matter where it is held, enter quietly and be seated. This is not a time to be social, but rather a time to show your support. The first few rows are usually reserved for the family, but you can sit closely behind them. Also, depending on the size of the ceremony, an usher may be there to guide you down the aisle.

The ceremony.

A member of the clergy usually leads the ceremony. You may not be familiar with the religious customs of the family, but just simply follow their guide.

At the end of the ceremony.

Usually, the family will need a few moments at the end of the ceremony to grieve. Once the service has concluded, make your way out promptly and sit in your car while the family says their final goodbyes. If you are going to be part of the procession, turn your headlights on to let the driver know you will be following and remember to turn them off when you arrive at the cemetery.

At the cemetery.

In the case of a graveside service, the chairs by the casket are reserved for the family. Following a brief word of encouragement or prayer, an announcement will usually be made indicating whether or not the family will be having guests at their home following the service.

Funeral attire.

While black may be tradition, it is not the only thing appropriate for a funeral. Conservative, proper attire for adults and children is acceptable. "Church clothes" are the usual attire, however your presence is more important than your dress.

Children and the funeral.

You will be the best judge of whether your child is ready to attend a funeral. Keep in mind their age and maturity. You may want to prepare them ahead of time and make sure they will be on their best behavior. If a child is noisy or cranky, be sure to take them out of the room immediately.

