

Funeral Etiquette

Do I need to be invited to a funeral or can anyone go?

Anyone can go. A funeral service is open to anyone, unless the family requests that it is a private ceremony.

Do I have to wear black?

No, wearing colorful clothing is no longer inappropriate for relatives and friends. Most people choose formal clothes like a suit, and men normally wear a tie.

Can children go to a funeral?

Yes, but toddlers and babies can be disruptive, especially if it's a long service. You can take older children if they want to go. It's a good idea to prepare them beforehand so they know what to expect.

Who travels with the funeral procession?

When the funeral ceremony and the burial are both held within the local area, it is appropriate for friends and relatives to accompany the family to the cemetery.

How can I help?

You can offer friendship and someone to talk to at a time when they need it most. There is often the assumption that family grief is private and that you may be intruding. But many people live far away from their family and would appreciate your help with practical things like preparing a meal, taking children to school, taking care of pets, or any other needs.

What should I say?

No matter what your means of expressing your sympathy, it is important to clearly identify yourself to the family. In addition to expressing sympathy it is appropriate, if desired, to relate to family members your

fond memories of the deceased. In some cases family members may simply want you to be a good listener to their expressions of grief or memories of the deceased. In most circumstances it is not appropriate to inquire as to the cause of death. When in person, sympathy should be expressed by clasping hands, an embrace, or a simple statement of condolence like: “My sympathy to you and your family” , “John was a fine person and friend. He will be missed” .

Do I send flowers or gifts?

It is completely up to you and depends on the closeness of your relationship with the family or the deceased. You can send flowers to the funeral home prior to the funeral, or to the family residence at any time. Florists know what is appropriate to send in the funeral context. Gifts in memory of the deceased are often made, particularly when the family has requested gifts in lieu of flowers. The family is notified of the gifts by personal note from the charity or other organization. Even if you don't make a gift, a note or card to the deceased's family expressing your thoughts of the deceased is a welcome gesture, especially if you weren't able to attend the funeral.

How can I help my friend?

One of the best ways you can help your friend is to allow them to feel what they want to feel. They may feel anger, guilt or fear. Let them talk these feelings through with you — don't try to stop them because you think they are irrational.

What happens at the cemetery?

The casket is normally placed on a casket lowering device over the grave, prior to when all the mourners gather at the gravesite. People then gather around the casket to listen to the rites of burial given by the clergy. Following the clergy's remarks, family members may place a flower on the casket. In some cases the funeral director and cemetery officer will provide flowers for each mourner. They should follow the family in placing flowers.

Do I approach the casket? If so, what do I do?

The decision of whether or not to approach the casket is a very individual one. It is not required or considered rude if you decide against it. Some people find that viewing the deceased helps you to accept the loss and move on, while others prefer to remember the deceased as they last saw them in life. If you decide to approach the casket, use that time to say your good-byes and pay your respects. Keep in mind that there are often long lines to follow and everyone deserves their moment with the deceased.

What do I do when I arrive at the service?

When you arrive, quietly take a seat if the service is being held in a church or chapel. The first few rows are usually reserved for the immediate family and the pallbearers. There may be an opportunity during the service for you to share some words about the deceased. If the ceremony is being held at the cemetery, seating is usually only available for the immediate family.

How often should I stay in touch?

Remember that grief doesn't go away in a few short weeks. Even one year or more 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."