

Saying Goodbye:

Funeral and Memorial Planning

It is not uncommon for someone to die without making plans regarding a ritual or memorial.

The following are some suggestions for how you might approach creating a ritual for a family member or friend.

Some Basics to Keep in Mind

- Don't rush. If it is at all possible, take time to plan and gather family and friends. There is often so much going on after a death that it may be hard to think straight. A few extra days in the planning of a service can make a big difference.
- As you begin planning, reflect on your loved one's basic values and beliefs. This may help guide your preparations and planning by keeping in mind what your loved one may have wanted.
- Be creative. Some of the most outrageous ideas end up being the most meaningful. For example, if your loved one's favorite past time was spending the day at an amusement park, you may want to celebrate his or her life by heading to the park for a day with family and friends.

Where to Begin

- Do you feel your loved one would have wanted a formal or more informal gathering?

- Is there someone you feel they would have wanted to lead the service? If so, who?

- Were there songs and/or pieces of music that they liked or appreciated? List any and all ideas:

- Were there favorite readings that they enjoyed? These could be passages of scripture, sacred text, poetry or favorite quotes.

- Is there a special gathering place or place of worship that your loved one would like for the gathering to be held?

Sharing Stories

Often an important part of a gathering is sharing stories. If possible:

- Have two or three people prepared to speak. This can help break the ice.
- If someone is shy, encourage them to write down their thoughts and have someone else read them.



- If someone can't make the gathering, encourage them to write down some thoughts and send them to be offered.
- Have someone lead this part of the gathering so that there is a flow to the sharing. They can also help encourage people to share.

Environment

- For the gathering, collect items that were important to your loved one and have them displayed. These might include art work, collections or favorite hobbies.
- Create photo collages of the person's life and place them on poster board to display.
- In addition, some families create a slide show of different images that is offered before or during the gathering.
- Invite musicians to perform live music for the gathering.

Burial and Cremation

Often separate rituals are done when the body or ashes of the person are buried or ashes are scattered.

- Consider placing dirt or flowers on the coffin or urn before it is buried. Note that most cemeteries require this to be pre-planned.
- For cremated remains, some people choose to plant a tree over some or all of the ashes after they are buried.
- Find a place of meaning to scatter ashes - in nature, at sea, a favorite spot.

- At times families will split up the ashes and place them in a keepsake for each loved one to have.

Ongoing Memorials

- Plant a tree in the name of the person. This can be done on one's own property or inquire at your local cemetery, as many are beginning to offer "green burials."
- Commemorate a bench or other public item in the name of your loved one. This could be located in a location that has meaning to friends and family.
- Create a fund or request donations for a particular cause that person felt passionate about in their lives.
- Consider having a ritual and/or celebration on the one year anniversary of the death.

If you are connected to a local hospice, the spiritual care provider can help you create a ritual or gathering for your loved one. In the end, trust your connection to the person and you will likely discover exactly what is needed for the ritual to be meaningful.

National Hospice and Palliative Care
Organization

CaringInfo



For More Information

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