

Funeral

What do you say? What do you do? Funerals can put people into unfamiliar, and therefore awkward, situations. The seriousness of the moment and the strain of grief make most of us nervous about doing and saying the right thing. Here are a few guidelines to help ease the stress:

1 Ceremonies Follow and respect directions. The greatest gift you can give to those in mourning is your respect of their beliefs and wishes. Some traditions may be unfamiliar or confusing to you. This is not the time to question them, or to use the occasion to deliberately make a statement about your own beliefs and traditions. Look to the Funeral Director for guidance. When in doubt, ask his or her advice.

2 Expressing your condolences

Once you learn of the death, and except where other wishes have been expressed, you should feel welcome to call or make a visit to express your sympathy. How long you stay will depend on the circumstances. Take your cue from the ones you are visiting. The days surrounding a funeral can be very tiring for the family, especially when age or emotional shock are a factor. Sometimes, a fifteen-minute visit or even a brief phone call is most appropriate.

3 Introducing yourself Unless it is clearly unnecessary, fully introduce yourself and your relationship to the deceased, such as, "Hello, my name is Jane Smith. I was Mary's neighbour and good friend when she lived in Kelowna."

4 Saying the right thing Don't think you have to become a professional grief counsellor. For people you know, bring up a favourite memory you have of the deceased. For someone you don't know, introduce yourself (see above) to prompt a conversation. Whatever the case, keep it brief. And if you can't think of the right words to say, don't worry. Often the best source of comfort to a grieving person is a good listener. (See *Reflections on Grieving*, p. 17).

5 What NOT to say Never inquire as to the cause or circumstances of the death. Don't try to say something deeply profound or to cheer up the situation. This is not the time to, "look on the brig-e" with an expression

such as, "Well, at least Joe isn't suffering any more." Be careful about trying to relate too closely to the situation with comments such as, "I know exactly how you feel." These moments are intensely personal. The fact is, you don't know how they feel.

6 Flowers and gifts Often, the family will request contributions be made to a favourite charity or worthy cause. Whatever the case, the degree to which you care is not measured by the size of the bouquet or donation. A simple card, brief visit or phone call can be very meaningful.

7 Children Virtually all child-care professionals agree that children should be welcome at funerals. If the child is a member of the bereaved family, make a point to include them in your conversations. For a child, a funeral can be an extremely lonely time in an adult world. If you and your child are there to lend support, ensure that your child does not detract from the proceedings.

8 Clothing The fact you're there is far more important than how you're dressed. Unless specified, black does not have to be worn at a funeral. Dress in a way that shows respect for the deceased, the place of ceremony, and the mourners.

9 Food/chores/errands Little things can make a big difference – but keep your good deeds simple. Offering to pick up somebody for the funeral, dropping off a casserole, or shoveling the sidewalk in winter are all welcome, caring gestures. Doing too much, though, can be overwhelming or create an unwanted sense of obligation. It isn't necessary, either, to show your support only during the time of the funeral. What you do weeks and even months later will be appreciated.

Want more information and resources on this topic? Booklets such as Is there anything I can do to help? are available at the Edwards Family Centre, 333 - 4th Ave. North. Call Eleanor or Doreen at 244-5577.