

Funeral Etiquette

We are pleased to offer the following advice on appropriate attire, what to say, viewing of the body, where to sit, flowers, condolence cards, gifts and food.

It's hard to know what to say or do at a time of loss. Even so, just knowing you're there for a friend or family member can be a comfort. There's certain etiquette to be followed when someone passes away. It's best to know what to expect to avoid acting in an inappropriate manner.

Upon learning of a passing, it's proper to pay your respects to the grieving family in the form of a visit. Depending on the family's religion or heritage, this can either be done at home or at the funeral home. Letting the family know you are there for them and offering your assistance can be a source of comfort to the bereaved. The visit doesn't have to last long, perhaps fifteen to thirty minutes or so, just enough to let the family know you care. Knowing what to say can be difficult. Offer your condolences and some kind words about the deceased. If a family member wants to talk about the deceased, be a good listener. There's no need to hide your emotions. It's normal to cry at a time of loss. If you find yourself becoming inconsolable, however, it's best to excuse yourself.

When visiting a bereaved family member or attending a funeral, it's customary to wear dark, respectful clothing. Bright colors and busy patterns are inappropriate for mourning.

Many religions offer visitations at the funeral home. If this is the case, proper etiquette dictates you first view the body or casket and pay your respects. If it's customary to your religion, you might offer a prayer. After paying your respects to the deceased, you may pay your respects to each family member. If you're an acquaintance or co-worker, or if the family members don't know who you are, please introduce yourself. Offer a handshake or a hug if the occasion warrants. After you've offered your condolences to the family, you may sit and meditate or talk quietly with others. You're not required to stay for the duration of the visitation, but if prayer services or speeches of any kind are being offered, it would be considered disrespectful to walk out while they're being conducted.

To express your condolences, it's customary to send flowers to the funeral home, or, depending on the religion of the deceased, a Mass card. Food baskets sent to the home of the deceased are most welcome at this time. In lieu of flowers, the family may request a donation to a charitable organization. It would also be kind to bring over casseroles or other easily prepared dishes so the bereaved has one less thing to worry about while they are mourning their loss.

A funeral can be held in any number of places depending on the family's heritage and religion. In most cases, it's held at a house of worship. A few people who are special to the deceased are chosen to be pallbearers. They will accompany the casket to the altar and will also exit with the casket. It's an honor to be chosen and gives the pallbearer one more occasion to do something special for the dearly departed.

When seating yourself, please leave the first few rows empty for family members, who may come in following the casket. A member of the clergy will probably conduct the ceremony, but it isn't at all uncommon for friends and family to say a few words about the deceased or read poems or even sing a song.

After the ceremony is over, proceed to your car to drive to the burial site. When following the funeral procession, be sure to turn on your headlights. This is to let the other cars on the road know you're part of the procession. At the cemetery, someone will offer a prayer or a few words of comfort. Many families don't choose to watch the casket lowered into the ground, although it's customary for some families to do so.

After the funeral, it's common practice to go to the home of a friend or family member for a reception. This is usually less somber than the funeral and gives everyone a chance to talk. Food from the reception can be catered or cooked by friends and family members. It would be a nice gesture to the family of the bereaved to bring a dish or help with clean up.

In the weeks after the funeral, check on the immediate family members to see if there's anything

they need. Chances are, they're doing just fine but knowing you're there for them will mean a lot.

It's not easy knowing how to behave when a friend or loved one passes away. As long as you conduct yourself in a respectful manner, you should be fine.