



At *Harrison Ross Mortuary*,

we have been a part of many memorial services, local and abroad. No matter the circumstances which surrounds the death; whether sudden or chronic, peaceful or violent, sudden or unexpected, death is difficult for everyone to cope with. At times, even our trained professionals, clergy, relatives, and close personal friends find it difficult to console someone close to us who has suffered a loss. We have put together some helpful suggestions you can do to help your loved one or friend through a difficult time as well as etiquette words to say or not to say.

Before the Funeral you can...

- Offer to notify the survivor's family and friends about funeral arrangements
- Help answering the phone and greeting visitors
- Keep a record of everyone who calls, visits or has been contacted
- Help coordinate the food and drink supply for family and visitors
- Offer to pick up friends and family at the airport. Arrange housing or referrals to appropriate, nearby hotels or motels
- Offer to provide transportation for out-of-town visitors
- Order an arrangement of sympathy flowers (i.e.: www.SimpleFlowersOnline.com)
- Help him or her keep the house cleaned and the dishes washed
- House-sit to prevent burglaries during the funeral and visitations

After the Funeral you can... (Consider doing these every week for two to three months)

- Prepare or provide dinner on a day that is mutually acceptable
- Offer to help with yard chores such as watering or pruning
- Feed and exercise the pets, if any
- Write notes offering encouragement and support
- Offer to drive or accompany him or her to the cemetery regularly
- Offer to house sit, so the survivor can take a restful vacation, or visit family or friends out of town
- Make a weekly run to the grocery store, laundry, or cleaners
- Help with the Thank You notes and/or other correspondence
- Anticipate difficult periods such as anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, and the day of death
- Always mention the deceased by name and encourage reminiscing

Condolence visit.

Upon learning of a death, close friends of the bereaving family, if possible, should visit the family's home to offer sympathy and assistance – this is sometimes referred to as a condolence visit. It may include helping with food preparation and child care. The visit can take place any

time within the first few weeks of death, and may be followed with one or more additional visits, depending on the circumstances and your relationship with the family.

Share memories.

In addition to expressing sympathy, it is appropriate, if desired, to relate to family members your fond memories of the deceased. In some cases friends and 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.

Show your respect.

It is customary to show your respects by viewing the deceased if the body is present and the casket is open. You may wish to say a silent prayer for, or meditate about, the deceased at this time. In some cases the family may escort you to the casket.

Visit with others.

The length of your stay at the visitation or funeral/graveside service or reception is a matter of discretion. After visiting with the family and viewing the deceased you can visit with others in attendance. Normally there is a register for visitors to sign and the family generally appreciates it if you would sign it.

Conservative dress.

As with other aspects of modern day society funeral dress codes have relaxed somewhat. Black dress is no longer required. Instead subdued or darker hues should be selected, the more conservative the better. After the funeral the family often receives invited visitors to their home for friendship and support.

Memorial contributions.

Charitable gifts in memory of the deceased are often made, particularly when the family has requested gifts to be made in lieu of flowers. The family is notified of the gifts by personal note from the donor or by the charity or other organization. In the latter case the donor provides the family's name and address to the charity at the time the gift is made.

Send a note or card.

Even if you don't send flowers or make a charitable contribution, a note or card to the deceased's family expressing your thoughts of the deceased is a welcomed gesture, especially if you weren't able to attend the funeral. It is important to let the bereaved know you are thinking of them. It can be a difficult situation when someone you care for has lost someone, and you're trying to express sympathy. When doing so, you need to be able to say the right thing and express appropriate thoughts. You're trying to offer support to the bereaved. If you're doing it in paper

form, you probably know that sympathy cards can be difficult to choose, and writing one is an even greater challenge.

Sympathy

It's hard to know what to say during a difficult time. Some things to remember when expressing sympathy include:

- Sympathy is much more about listening than talking.
- Know that each person grieves in his or her own way and that there is no 'right' way to grieve.
- You don't need to know exactly what the person is going through (i.e. what it's like to have someone close to you die) to express sympathy. A simple thing like making eye contact with them can help you understand what they are feeling and help you to find the right thing to say, even if that's just, "I'm not sure I know what to say to you."
- Avoid platitudes when speaking or writing to them. Don't say, "I know just how you feel," "Time heals all wounds" or "Into every life, some rain must fall." These phrases often come across as insincere.
- Some families can be so overcome with grief and so overwhelmed at the time of the funeral that they may not immediately remember who you are. Don't take this personally and be prepared to help them with the names of your spouse, children, etc.
- On the other hand, you may be in a situation where you need to talk to the deceased's spouse and other close relatives whom you don't know. Find out from others their names and how they are related to the deceased.

How to go about expressing sympathy.

While a personal greeting is a great way to connect with the bereaved, a well thought out personal letter to the grieving family expressing your honest feelings about the deceased is a wonderful way to express sympathy. They're going to be seeing a lot of people over the first couple of weeks following a death and it can be overwhelming. A letter can be held onto and it may provide comfort to the grieving in the weeks and months after the funeral is over and the chaos has settled down. This is when the loss of their beloved (and the attendant loneliness) really sets in.

What to say or write.

If you can't think of anything to write, it's perfectly okay to use simple phrases such as:

- “I am very sorry at your loss.”
- “I am praying for you.”

You can also suggest ways that you can help, by using questions with a yes or no answer. For example ask, “Do you need a babysitter for the grandkids?” or, “Would it help if we brought you a meal?” You can help in many different, imaginative ways. Don't forget that planning a funeral is a difficult, expensive and potentially overwhelming process. If you know something about one particular aspect of funeral planning, your knowledge could be a great way to help ease the burden of loss. Remember, sympathy is just another word for offering support.

Expressing Sympathy

Cards and flowers are the most popular forms of expressing sympathy, but it's increasingly accepted and understood that there are a wide variety of ways to express your thoughts at the time of a funeral. Funerals, as a celebration of someone's life and a commemoration of their passing, are becoming more personal, as family and friends become more involved. Funeral homes and families are much more open to originality of expression than they once were. It's understood that people deal with death and grief in different ways and that mourning is an individual as well as a group process. Funeral directors have seen teenagers wearing T-shirts with their friends' pictures on them; car shows and poker runs have become popular forms of memorial. You can even buy small gifts like ornaments or knick-knacks, or you can make something of your own, to comfort the bereaved. As the concept of funerals begins to change, there are also a growing number of unique new ways of expressing sympathy.

Sympathy Flowers & Gift Baskets.

One accepted means of offering sympathy is to send flowers or a gift basket. There are a number of companies that make sympathy flowers and gift baskets, which can often be personalized for the person to whom you are sending it. Our personal favorite company is Simply Flowers. (www.SimpleFlowersOnline.com)