

How to Grieve When You Are Unable to Attend a Funeral or Memorial Service

When someone we love dies, we often find that going to their funeral or memorial service helps us to deal with our sense of loss. However, there may be times when we are not physically able to attend these special services. Or, in some cases, the service must be delayed. There are still ways to mourn the loss of your loved one if you are unable to attend the funeral or memorial service. The following ideas are ways to remember and honor your loved one who has passed.

- Find photos of your loved one to remember and celebrate their life, as well as mourn their death. You may find it gives you comfort to share these photos and memories with others who share your loss.
- Collect photos or memories from others and put them in a photo album, slideshow or book of memories.
- Use photos to create a video of memories. You may want to include recordings of others sharing their special memories.
- Visit a place that holds a special memory of a time you spent with your loved one. You may want to leave something at this place such as flowers, a poem or toy.
- Create a special place to honor your loved one. This could be a place in your garden, an altar in your home where you can pray or a place for a photo(s) to be hung on a wall.
- Have a personal memorial service by yourself or invite a few others who are able to attend. You may want to include special music, poems or share special memories.
- During holidays and other special occasions, think about family rituals and traditions. Take a moment to honor your loved one in a special way.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

- Have a meal or picnic that includes your loved one's favorite food. Stop to focus on their life as you enjoy their favorite food.
- Release butterflies or bubbles. Plant a tree or garden. This may help you to say good-bye.
- Light a candle and share special memories. Include others, if possible. You may decide to do this at the same time the funeral or memorial service is taking place at another location.
- Send a hand written letter to a family member or loved one to share your feelings, a fond memory or words of comfort.
- Do not focus on being unable to attend the funeral or memorial service. Focus on the life that was well lived during this time.
- Help a cause or make a donation in memory of your loved one.
- Stay in touch with others who loved and grieve the loss of this person. Connect on the phone or online to provide support to one another.
- Later, visit your loved one's grave or the place where the ashes were scattered. This gives you a personal time to remember them.
- Check with the funeral director to see if there are options they provide to help you join in the celebration of your loved one's life.
 - ▶ The funeral or memorial service may be live-streamed over the internet.
 - ▶ Ask if there is a way you can be included in the service although you may be far away. For example, you may be able to send a video in which you do a reading, sing a song or present a eulogy. It may be possible to be included in the actual service through streaming on the internet.
 - ▶ The service may be recorded and made available to you to watch at a later date and time.
 - ▶ Online messages can be posted and shared among those who mourn for this person. These messages can be thought of as a virtual hug and give support for one another.
- If you are planning the service, talk to your funeral director about options for delaying the service until a later time when you and other loved ones can be present. You can have the cremation or burial when your loved one dies and hold this service later.

- ▶ If you were unable to talk with your loved one before their death about their wishes for a service, think about what they may have wanted and what would be most meaningful to them.

It is important to find a way to express your loss in a way that feels right for you. Take time to reflect on your inner thoughts and feelings. Provide support to others who share this loss with you. Acknowledge the reality of your loved one's death. Not being present at a funeral or memorial service can cause a sense that the death never happened or it was a bad dream. Give yourself a chance to honor the life of your loved one who has died. Remember that the pain from grief gets better, but the healing process takes time.