

# Family Guide to Meaningful Funerals

## Getting Facts & Feelings Right



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## The Basic Decision - Burial or Cremation

Americans are evenly split between burial and cremation preferences for funerals, with cremation gaining popularity.

Every family faces a unique situation, and while funeral traditions hold significance, there are various approaches to deciding whether to bury or cremate a loved one being commemorated in a funeral service.

The choice between cremation and burial may be predetermined by the individual or left to the family. However, numerous other crucial decisions stem from this initial choice. It can be challenging as both burial and cremation have compelling arguments unless a clear preference is expressed.



Burial holds significant emotional and spiritual significance for many families, providing closure and a sense of connection beyond individual grief. Viewing the loved one before burial offers a personal goodbye, while a traditional gravesite becomes a cherished site for remembrance. Certain religions mandate burial with specific rituals, while others view it as a natural sanctification of death. Burial also offers the possibility of future



exhumation for various purposes, unlike cremation, which is usually final. Its historical and cultural prevalence offers inspiration for meaningful funeral services.

Families have the freedom to choose any funeral arrangement with cremation, and some opt for burial alongside it. While cremation might be necessary or preferred, burial often remains the top choice. Many perceive cremation as environmentally friendly due to its space and resource efficiency. The portability of ashes allows families more flexibility in decision-making. Cremation can also be cost-effective with fewer decisions required. Furthermore, numerous creative options exist for handling cremated remains, such as transforming them into gemstones or incorporating them into ocean reefs.



## What makes some funeral services so meaningful?

Gathering friends and family to honor a loved one's life is a profound and fulfilling experience. Collaborating on a funeral service offers a positive means for families to navigate grief and find closure. Throughout history, sharing and celebrating memories at funerals have facilitated healing and closure for mourners.

Memories, love, grief, and sadness are central to every funeral and memorial service. Planning such a service involves incorporating the diverse relationships and histories

each attendee has with the deceased. Achieving this inclusivity allows attendees, both present and absent, to cherish the departed in their memories and hearts.

“Creating a funeral service together is one of the most positive ways that a family can navigate this difficult experience.”



## What questions should family members ask each other to help prepare the most meaningful funeral service?

When collecting personal information for a memorial, it's crucial to contact everyone who mattered to the individual. This includes friends, family, coworkers, distant relatives, ex-partners, and children from various relationships. Whoever is tasked with gathering these memories will reach out to a wide range of people who played a part in the person's life.

Experienced funeral directors understand that certain questions can evoke personal memories. Here are prompts to guide the conversation:

- How long have you known (name) and how did you first meet?

- Did your friendship develop gradually or was it immediate? Can you share how it unfolded?
- Is there a specific anecdote that encapsulates (name)'s essence? Something they'd want us to remember?
- How did (name)'s life influence your own and others' lives?
- What aspect of your memories of (name) do you cherish the most?
- If (name) were here, what do you think they would want you to share with other friends and family?

## Why have funeral services with a cremation – isn't the whole idea to keep it simple?

Choosing a simple and affordable cremation option doesn't diminish the possibility of a meaningful and memorable funeral service. Families can opt for traditional or contemporary formats, or any other arrangement that honors the life of their loved one.



Many individuals who prearrange cremation also specify their desired ceremony, allowing funeral directors to guide proceedings according to the deceased's final wishes. Beyond burial or placement in a columbarium, funeral homes and cemeteries



offer various options, such as scattering ashes in dedicated fields or arranging dispersal at sea, including environmentally friendly choices. Experienced funeral directors can advise on traditional or unconventional ceremonies, aligning with both the individual's preferences and the family's wishes.

Even without prior planning, there are numerous meaningful options available for honoring and placing the ashes of a loved one. Funeral homes and cemeteries are experiencing a rise in families seeking active participation in crafting memorable tributes. Many funeral directors embrace this chance to innovate beyond tradition, fostering more personalized and meaningful funerals.



## Where can we find inspiration for a meaningful funeral service?

The internet offers a plethora of stories and pictures showcasing various ways families honor their loved ones. For those seeking to create a meaningful and personal tribute, drawing inspiration from shared experiences of others can serve as a valuable guide.

Many families enlist experienced professionals to strike the ideal balance between ceremony and simplicity. Platforms like Pinterest and Instagram host a vast array of funeral and celebration visuals. Additionally, Facebook's "Tributes" section offers diverse memorial choices. A brief search using phrases like "personalized funeral" and "creative cremation" unveils countless stories and images depicting innovative and heartfelt ways to honor a loved one's passing.

People honor their loved ones with a wide range of events and expressions, spanning from intensely personal to boldly patriotic, from devoutly green to plainly political, and from traditionally sacred to new age spiritual. What truly matters in any funeral service, memorial, or celebration is how effectively it allows everyone to remember and honor their love for the departed, regardless of whether it follows tradition or creativity, simplicity or elaboration.



## What's the best way to create a meaningful obituary?

Family members tasked with planning a meaningful funeral for a loved one should gather both factual details and insights into the personalized aspects of the upcoming memorial.

Most newspapers provide readily available guidelines for writing obituaries, offering "fill in the blanks" templates. Funeral directors are also available to assist in ensuring correctness.

A famous obituary writer offered great advice for any family member struggling with the factual part of writing an obituary:

"Ask a professional for help – the newspaper staff and funeral home are always ready, and they don't make mistakes or leave out anyone or anything important."

While accuracy in stating facts is crucial, the essence of a meaningful obituary lies in preserving the memories cherished by those who loved the departed. Capturing and incorporating these memories into the obituary is essential for crafting a meaningful tribute to the person's life.

That same great obituary writer summed up the single most important point in writing an obituary:

"The aim is to make your obituary a lasting memorial worthy of a scrapbook – a tribute that gives family and friends something to be proud of long after the upheaval of loss."