

Attending a Jewish Funeral

A Guide for the Non-Jewish Guest

Jewish funeral traditions are deeply rooted in faith, respect, and community. For those outside the faith, understanding these customs can help you feel more comfortable and show sincere support to the bereaved family.



Need Guidance?

If you've been invited to a Jewish funeral and would like to know what to expect, our caring team at Horan & McConaty is here to help.

Call us anytime at (303) 745-4418 for details about a specific service or to learn more about honoring faith-based traditions with understanding and respect.

What to Expect

Jewish funerals follow long-standing customs designed to honor the deceased and comfort the living. Burials take place as soon as possible—often within 24 hours—so once you receive an invitation, plan to attend promptly.

A traditional Jewish funeral includes:

1. **Shmira (Guarding the Body):** From the moment of death until burial, the body is never left alone. A family member or appointed guardian recites psalms or prays quietly.
2. **Funeral Service:** Typically brief and simple, lasting about 15 minutes, and held at a synagogue, funeral home, or graveside. Psalms are recited, followed by a eulogy and prayers, including *El Maleh Rachamim*—a plea for the soul's peace.
3. **Burial:** Family and friends accompany the casket to the grave. Each mourner may place a shovelful of earth on the casket as a final act of love and respect. Flowers and music are not customary.
4. **Shiva (Mourning Period):** A seven-day period of mourning follows the funeral, held in the family's home. Friends and community members visit to offer comfort, share food, and support the family in prayer and remembrance.

Longer mourning observances may continue privately for 30 days (*sheloshim*) and up to 11 months for close relatives.

What to Wear

Dress modestly and in dark, conservative clothing. Men typically wear a suit and tie; women may wear a dress or skirt covering the knees and shoulders. Men are often given a *yarmulke* (skullcap) to wear, though it's optional for non-Jews. Women may wear a scarf or head covering if provided.

Etiquette & Participation

- Follow the lead of others—stand or sit when they do.
- It's respectful to remain quiet and attentive during prayers.
- Express condolences to the family after the funeral, typically during *Shiva*, not at the service itself.
- Do not bring or send flowers. Instead, bringing food for *Shiva* (kosher if possible) or making a charitable donation (*tzedakah*) in the deceased's memory is an appropriate gesture.

Supporting a Friend in Grief

Even across faiths, your presence and compassion bring comfort. Visiting during *Shiva*, offering a kind word, or contributing to a meaningful cause in the loved one's name are thoughtful ways to show care and respect.