

What Can We Do If a Funeral Is Not Possible?

Funerals play an important role in healing following the death of a loved one. They bring people together to support one another, provide an opportunity to share our thoughts and feelings, and help us to accept that a death is “real.” Planning a funeral can give us something to DO at a time when so much feels out of control.

When family or life circumstances prevent or disrupt a funeral, we may feel an additional sense of loss. This is normal. We gain strength and support from being together to support one another and when this is not possible, we must look for creative ways to cope. If your loved one’s funeral has been disrupted or cancelled, take some time to pay attention to your feelings and talk with others who may be experiencing a similar reaction. Often, we can find a way to put together a meaningful time of remembrance despite the challenges presented.

Things to try in the days to come:

- If a small service is possible, investigate the possibility of creating a video or even streaming the service so that more people can feel a part of the ritual. You may invite family members or friends to send a video to be included in the service or a note that can be read.
- If you attend a small service, but know of others who cannot participate, call them afterward. Tell them about the service and spend time sharing memories and support over the phone.
- Create a personal ritual that can be duplicated in homes of family members or friends. Choose a time and invite everyone to light a candle, share a special meal, or read a prayer of remembrance. You may find that you can use technology to share these small rituals with each other.
- Consider inviting people to participate in an activity of remembrance. We have included a list of some things you might try.

In the coming weeks and months:

- Choose a date with significance to your family or loved one and plan a memorial service. Include the elements you missed the most and celebrate the support and connection of those who are able to come together at this time.
- Continue to connect with friends and family who are grieving. We often reach out to each other immediately following a loss, but it is the support in the following months that sustains us.
- Remember that bereavement support is available. Bereavement Counselors at Bluegrass Care Navigators are available to offer guidance throughout the grieving process. Our grief care services are currently being conducted telephonically but are available to anyone who needs support.

Family Activities of Remembrance

Memory Boxes

These are used to place special items that the loved one had given to an individual, mementos of special times, or this could be a place to put notes or drawings to the deceased. You can choose a special container, or even use a cardboard box and decorate all the sides with markers or paint.

Memory Pages

Invite friends and family members to use scrapbooking paper and create a page about your loved one that died. Each person can highlight memories, or information such as their name, birthday, date of death, favorite food, favorite activities. Or, make a page about your favorite memory by answering these questions: “I remember you when...” “I feel closer to you when. . . .”

Plant a Living Tree, Plant, or Flowers

This can represent the renewal of the life cycle in memory of the deceased. Tending a growing plant is a symbol of an on-going relationship and provides many chances for family members to reflect on their loss.

Memory Ribbon or Flag

Decorate a ribbon in memory of the loved one who died, using wide ribbon and magic markers. Place the ribbon on a tree or in a special place of remembrance. You can also use a strip of fabric. If you use washable markers, the words or images will fade over time, as if the message is being sent where it needs to go.

Sidewalk Chalk Art

Decorate your sidewalk or driveway with pictures or words in memory of your loved one. Invite others to do the same and send each other pictures.

Make a Playlist

Make a list of songs that were favorites of your loved one. This playlist will help you think of them when you listen to it. Include songs from your times together such as songs from their wedding or things played when you were young. Also include songs that express your feelings.

Memory Jar

Use any jar or container you like. You might choose a glass jar and decorate it with paints or decoupage. Have family members write memories on strips of paper and add it to the jar. Share the memories with each other as you place them into the jar. During special days get the jar out and reread them as a family to remember together.

Memory Luminaries

Choose a special candle, or create a candleholder with art materials such as paint or tissue paper decoupage. Light the candle at meals or during time together as a family. Invite family members to do the same in their own homes. If you use a battery-operated candle, you may choose to leave it lit for a few days or overnight as a connection with family members who can't be together.