

Planning a service when someone has died.

This is hard. In the middle of grief, talking about how to honor the life of someone you have lost is hard and confusing and sad.

Or maybe, you are helping your family plan ahead by expressing your wishes.

A funeral home will help you prepare for the service. They are experienced in the details of transportation, options, logistics, arrangements. That said, their role is to help you. So here are things you can think about. When you have this filled out as much as possible, share it with the funeral director.

Full name and nickname:

Dates of birth and death:

1. What's the story that you want to tell?

For example, my dad loved everyone. My sister was the best friend you could ever have. My grandpa was loving and ornery. If you didn't have a friend and needed help in the middle of the night, my mom was the person to call.

The story:

2. What kind of gathering did they want to have or to avoid? Why did they want that?

For example, if they didn't want to be seen, there doesn't have to be anything open. If they didn't want people pretending to care, it can be for only close friends. If it's about money, you can find options.

3. What kind of service do you want to have?

Funeral: The body is present. As a result, the service happens within a few days of death.

Memorial service or celebration of life: The body is not present. The ashes may or may not be present. The service happens any time from a couple of days after death to several months later. The timing can allow for the presence of all the loved ones who can come. The timing can also allow for weather accommodation.

Graveside service: Happens at a cemetery, immediately before the body or ashes are placed in the ground or in a mausoleum. Sometimes the graveside service follows the funeral or memorial service, sometimes it is instead of a funeral. Sometimes it's private, just for family. Sometimes it's weeks after the service.

A picnic: This is a gathering of friends and/or family where you eat together, tell stories, and remember the person who isn't with you. You can have the ashes present.

Something else:

4. What has to be part of the service? What can't be part?

What songs, what stories, what Bible stories, what videos, what poems, what objects from their life? And what do you want to be sure to leave out?

5. Who do you want to be part of the service?

To tell stories

To sing

To read the Bible or other writings

To carry the casket or an urn

To _____

6. Who do you want to lead the service?

It helps to have someone help plan the service, make sure people are where they should be, and be the host, or the master of ceremonies, or the guide, or the pastor. The funeral director can offer suggestions. If you know a pastor or a chaplain, they can help.

7. Who do you want to sit where?

Usually, family is in the front row, with the closest next of kin in the middle. Then other family in the next rows. But sometimes, a family friend is like family, a significant other is the closest to being next of kin.

8. What are the people things to be aware of?

- Who will need physical support? (Walking concerns, health concerns)
- Who will need emotional support?
- What children will be having a hard time? Who can best support them?
- What disruptions are possible? (Is there someone who may want to cause conflict?)

9. What questions do you need answers to?

10. What else do you want the funeral director to know?