

Planning an After-Pandemic Memorial Service Having the Conversation With Families

"Each person's grief is as unique as their fingerprint. But what everyone has in common is that no matter how they grieve, they share a need for their grief to be witnessed. That doesn't mean needing someone to try to lessen it or reframe it for them. The need is for someone to be fully present to the magnitude of their loss without trying to point out the silver lining."
~ David Kessler, author of *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief* and founder of Grief.com.

Grief demands to be witnessed. And yet during the pandemic – for some there have been no gatherings during which bereaved individuals could share their pain with others. As part of your funeral home's aftercare outreach to families you have served during the pandemic, consider integrating a discussion of a memorial service once it is safe for larger groups to gather in your community.

Even if they initially intended to have a service at a later time when their loved one initially died, some families may now be resistant to having a service months or even a year or more after a death. The following discussion guide offers suggested dialogue to help families understand that it's never too late to honor the life of their loved one. Using these talking points as your guide, put your responses in your own words based on how you think each family will best receive the information.

If someone says...

Why would we want to have a service months from now?

I don't think there's any value in having a service in the future.

I don't want to prolong my grief by having a service down the road.

I don't want to relive my loved one's death six months from now.

I don't want to deal with the expense.

I just want to move on.

Reply with...

Having a memorial service several weeks or even months after a death provides ample time to create a meaningful tribute that beautifully honors the life of your loved one. It also makes it possible for friends and family, especially those who live at a distance, to be in attendance.

A funeral or memorial service, regardless of when it is held, offers a great deal of value to those who cared about (name of deceased). It provides the opportunity to gather, support one another, share memories and say goodbye. I think you'll find there are many friends and family members who would appreciate being able to do so... and you may appreciate it, too.

Grief can be difficult and complicated; however, having a service, even months from now, won't prolong your grief. In fact, it can play a very important role in helping you continue on your grief journey by giving you the opportunity to share your grief and memories.

A meaningful service doesn't have to mean spending a lot of money. I would be happy to discuss some options with you.

It's very common to feel that way, but in my experience, people who have forgone having a service have found that it is, in fact, more difficult to move on. A big part of moving on involves publicly acknowledging our grief and being comforted by those who share in our pain. A service can help with that.

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If someone says...

Most of our family lives out of town, so a service doesn't make much sense either way.

My loved one didn't even want a service, so it doesn't make sense to have one.

If I want to do something, I'll just plan it myself.

We already had a service for immediate family that was webcast. Why would we have another service?

Reply with...

Holding a service a few months in the future provides out-of-town guests the opportunity to plan to attend. But if they are unable to travel, there are many virtual options available that will enable them to attend in a meaningful way.

A funeral or memorial service honors the dead by giving loved ones the opportunity to gather and reflect on the life of a person with whom they spent time and created memories. It also helps family and friends acknowledge the death and prepare to begin the grief journey.

It's quite possible (name of deceased) didn't want their death to be a burden to you and others. They likely wanted to make things easier for you, but in reality, not having a funeral can make things more difficult for those grieving the loss.

It is, of course, natural to want to honor the wishes of a loved one. However, it's just as important, if not more so, to take into consideration your needs and the needs of family members and friends because you are the ones who need to move forward in your grief.

If you feel that a funeral or memorial service would help you and others continue to heal in a healthy way, let's talk about some options for a service that would both meet your needs and honor (name of deceased) in a way they would appreciate.

I understand that. Whether you plan something yourself or invite us to help with the details, we have a helpful guide that may be useful as you get started (RememberingALife.com/Free-Resources).

Please know that if you have any questions as you plan, I would be happy to serve as a sounding board or offer suggestions.

A funeral honors the dead by giving loved ones the opportunity to gather and reflect on the life of a person with whom they spent time and created memories. While some members of your immediate family were able to gather for a service and other family and friends were able to participate virtually, I think you'll find there are many friends and family members who would appreciate being part of an in-person service to pay tribute to (name of deceased).