

## Funerals during COVID-19

The grief journey is naturally lonely, and the COVID-19 pandemic is making it all the more challenging with emphasis on social distancing and government bans on large gatherings. In the case of funerals in Kentucky, Gov. Andy Beshear has reinforced the CDC recommendations to limit services to immediate family and private burials with larger memorial services postponed until safer times. Other states have limited services to 10 people, which includes family, clergy, and funeral home staff. Some states have even cancelled all in-person services. As a result, many grieving families are wondering what to do. How do you honor someone's end-of-life or funeral wishes? Whom do you choose to attend? Should you postpone? Can you livestream a funeral? These are becoming common questions for an increasing number of grieving families.

Funerals are important because they help honor a person's life, provide closure to those left behind, and serve as a source of comfort to the grieving (NFDA, 2020). Coming together and sharing stories can help people cry, laugh, and celebrate a life. Even if people cannot physically be together, it is important for family and friends to find ways to mourn.

Because mourning is important for the living, grief experts suggest that families find creative ways to hold some sort of grieving ritual (Crowther, 2020).

- **Hold a small, private service** with a larger celebration of life postponed for a later date. You can do this whether you plan to have the body cremated or buried.
- **Livestream the funeral online.** Close friends or family members may attend in person, while others can watch and even participate from home with live chats and/or webcams. People can remotely receive programs, copies of the eulogy, family photos, and videos. Because of advances in technology and increased distance between families, companies have worked with funeral homes long before the coronavirus to livestream services.
- **Go outside.** You will still have to maintain social distance recommendations and contain your numbers to fewer than 10, but a graveside event may allow for less contact. If you're not planning a burial, you could use an outdoor venue to hold a memorial service.
- **Communicate your plans.** Obituaries both honor the deceased and communicate details of the funeral arrangements. Today, it is common to post obituaries on social media, funeral home websites, and to print them in local newspapers. If you plan a remote funeral, you can provide access information. If you choose to postpone services, let people know. If you opt for a small private ceremony, leave out the time and location and just say that services will be private.

An anonymous person once said, "When words are inadequate, have a ritual." Virtual gatherings may not be ideal, but they can provide families with a ritual that supports peace of mind and is an opportunity to mourn and laugh and celebrate together.

One Kentucky family, who decided to postpone their service until a time when more could gather and properly celebrate their loved one, shared their plan to meet online through webcams to talk about their loved one and provide support to one another.

As you decide what is best for you, keep in mind that a funeral ritual — no matter how big or small, or traditional or creative — helps people acknowledge the death and say good-bye. Funeral rituals also provide support, encourage reflection, and offer hope for the living (NFDA, 2020). If postponing a service or waiting for an in-person gathering is your choice, the support will wait for you.

**References:**

- Crowther, L. (2020). Funerals during the covid-19 coronavirus epidemic: How to plan. Retrieved <https://www.legacy.com/advice/funerals-during-the-covid-19-coronavirus-epidemic-how-to-plan>
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**Source:**

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