

We are ALL well acquainted with the details associated with the conduct of American Legion services for our comrades, but there are additional elements of etiquette and protocol that aren't part of our manual. This reference helps to fill-in gaps.



Advice on What to Do Before, During and After a Funeral Service

Knowing what to do before, during and after a funeral service can be difficult, especially if you are personally affected by the loss. While every service is unique, we have outlined a few basic tips to help you determine what to do when someone you know loses a loved one.

Prior to the Service

Send a Card or Sign the Online Guestbook with a personal note to offer your condolences. Many families will read the messages again for ongoing emotional support.

Check the obituary, contact the funeral home or visit the funeral home's web site to confirm the service is open to the public. Remember to ask the funeral home if there is a viewing, as well as if it is appropriate to send flowers or make a charitable donation.

Honor flower/donation requests. If the family requests a donation to a charitable organization in lieu of flowers, it is important to honor the family's wishes. Generally, information on the charity can be found at the funeral home. If the family does not request a charitable contribution, it is customary to send flowers for the service.

Show Your Support. If you are a close friend of the family, a great way to express sympathy is through actions. Volunteer to pick up their dry cleaning, shop for groceries, deliver meals, or even help with household chores. You might offer to help make necessary phone calls or stay at the house to take calls and receive guests while family members make arrangements at the funeral home or cemetery.

During the Service

Wear Proper Funeral Attire. It's important to dress appropriately for the service. While there is no longer a requirement to wear all black, it is always safe to wear conservative clothing in dark or neutral colors.

Arrive Early. Arrive at the funeral home, church, synagogue, temple or chapel at least 15 minutes before the service is expected to begin. Remember to turn off all cell phones and all electronic devices that can make noises, such as a watch alarm.

Sign the Register Book so that the family can have a keepsake of everyone who came to pay their respects. If you attend both the visitation and the funeral, you would most likely sign the register book only once. Sometimes the register book is divided into sections for each specific event, so you may want to ask the funeral home staff if it is appropriate to sign the book for each event you attend.

Hug the Family Members. Offer your condolences by giving family members a hug. Remember to keep your words compassionate and sincere.

Participate in the Ceremony. While every service is different, and it is important to follow the lead of the clergy or main speaker, participate in the service as appropriate. Whether it is singing along with the music or accepting the invitation to say a few words, participating in the ceremony will not only help you grieve, but also will comfort the family. If asked to speak, be mindful of length of the service and respectful of the time of the other guests. Stand up to speak if you are seated, and be specific, clear and concise in your remarks.

Turn on your Headlights if you are part of the funeral procession to a graveside ceremony.

After the Service

Offer Transportation to Out of Town Guests. Many family members and close friends will travel to attend the service. Offering transportation to the airport or around town is a nice way to ease the burden on the family.

Call or Stop by for a Visit. Remember to check in with the family several days after the service and again once out-of-town guests return home. Often times the bereaved needs someone to talk to or temporarily distract them from their loss.

Deliver Food. Delivering meals helps take the burden off the family, especially if they are hosting out of town guests. You may want to consider delivering meals prior to the service as well.

Stay Connected and Proactive. It's important to come up with creative ways to stay connected because many times the bereaved will not feel like socializing or will not want to ask for help. Instead of asking the family if there is anything they need, do something special for them. Try offering suggestions like "I'm heading to the bakery for fresh bread and will drop off a basket on my way home." You can also send flowers, cards or other mementos that show you are thinking about them.