

FILLING IN THE MISSING PIECES

A Guide to Telling a Life Story



After entering hospice care, people often feel unprepared for what comes next. There are so many puzzle pieces in life—family, work, health, estate planning, final wishes—and they can seem disconnected, especially if no one in the family has ever discussed them.

This guide will walk you through tips for creating a truly personalized funeral or memorial service and help you gather the information you will need to fill in the missing pieces and make the funeral planning process as smooth as possible for loved ones.



1. Life Story

Use this information to tell your story, adding personal touches that will help create a life tribute ceremony or a meaningful obituary.

In Community Since _____

Date & Place Married _____

Occupation (former, if retired) _____

Employer _____

Number of Years Employed _____ City & State _____

Community Involvement (ex: Chamber of Commerce, Lions Club, etc.) _____

Home Church _____ City _____ State _____

Hobbies, Interests, Passions _____

Favorite Family Memories _____

Greatest Life Lessons _____

Treasured Accomplishments _____



Your stories and memories will bring comfort to family members. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words, but a memory is priceless.

2. Personal Wishes for a Funeral or Memorial Service

Create a personalized final tribute that finds the balance between your wishes and the emotional needs of surviving family members.

PLANNING A FUNERAL IS A GIFT

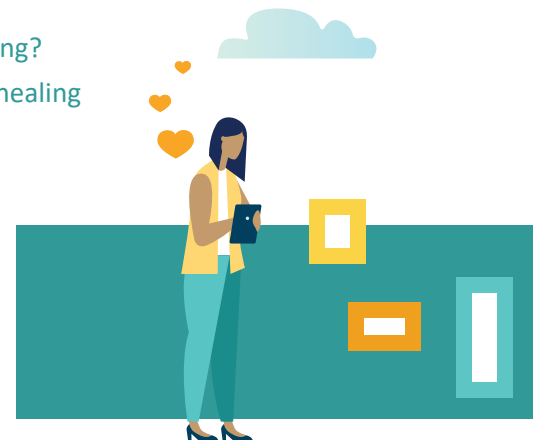
As you plan for a funeral, know that what you are doing will have a lasting and profoundly important impact on the lives of those you love the most. A meaningful funeral experience brings a sense of hope and a feeling of gratitude for life, love, and memories. So, what creates a meaningful funeral experience? There are several significant elements, or pieces, of a funeral. Blending these pieces together reflects your unique life and allows your loved ones to have their needs met through a meaningful funeral ceremony. Thoughtfully combining these elements creates a transformative experience for your loved ones as they remember and honor the life you lived.

REMEMBER...

The more elements you can incorporate into a funeral, the more meaningful and healing it will be. Together the elements are greater than the sum of their parts. When people and ceremony come together, meaning emerges and healing begins to unfold. If you've been to a special birthday party, wedding, or funeral, you've experienced the magic of ceremony. Now, you have all the tools you need to plan an element-rich funeral or memorial! Making your wishes known is one of the best gifts you can give your loved ones.

LET'S TALK ABOUT HOW TO CELEBRATE A WONDERFUL LIFE

- ☐ Do you have pictures and music to share at the visitation, service, or gathering?
- ☐ Would you like to show a tribute video filled with meaningful photos, video clips, and music?
- ☐ Do you want to include a time for family and/or friends to share their most precious and memorable stories? Are there certain people who should speak?
- ☐ Do you have a preferred officiant for your service?
- ☐ What hobbies or activities have helped define your life (ex: golfing, gardening, fishing, travel souvenirs, games played, woodworking projects, etc.)?
- ☐ Are there any favorite (or least favorite) foods to include at a gathering?
- ☐ Are there any activities to include in the ceremony? Participation in healing actions is helpful for mourners.
 - ◆ Singing a favorite song together
 - ◆ Releasing balloons or another meaningful object
 - ◆ Lighting candles
 - ◆ Watching a favorite TV show or movie
 - ◆ Planting a favorite flower or tree
 - ◆ Telling jokes, ringing bells, playing board games



In reality, the sky is the limit when creating a personalized and meaningful final tribute. Involve loved ones as you create a moment of remembrance that will truly reflect a life well-lived and bring comfort to those who attend the service and participate in healing actions.

A HEALING EXPERIENCE

Dr. Alan Wolfelt, a nationally recognized grief counselor and educator, has found in his decades of helping grieving families that there are seven main elements to a healing and meaningful funeral or memorial service.

They are music, readings, visitation/reception, eulogy/remembrance, symbols, gathering, and actions. The more elements you can incorporate and personalize, the more meaningful and healing the service will be.

In the space below, you will find room to capture ideas for personalizing each element to create a truly unique and personal final tribute.



To learn more about these elements, [click here](#).

MUSIC _____

READINGS _____

VISITATION / RECEPTION _____

EULOGY / REMEMBRANCE _____

SYMBOLS _____

GATHERING _____

ACTIONS _____

Honoring, Remembering, Healing

THE ELEMENTS OF A MEANINGFUL FUNERAL

For centuries, funerals have helped us say goodbye. Funerals honor and remember the person who died. They also surround us with the loving support of friends and family.

Regardless of the kind of service you have in mind, it helps to understand the parts of a meaningful funeral. Each element serves a unique purpose and plays an important role.

When you put the pieces together, you create a ceremony deserving of the special life that was lived.

Music

Music that has personal meaning to you or the person who died expresses what words alone could never say.

Readings

Poems, spiritual or religious verses, and passages from meaningful texts offer words of comfort and support.

Visitation / Reception

A gathering before the funeral is a time for mourners to greet one another. If the body is present, it is also a chance to acknowledge the reality of the death and say final goodbyes.

Eulogy / Remembrance

This tribute recalls and celebrates the life story of the person who died. It gives voice to our inner thoughts and feelings about this person and helps us begin to embrace the meaning of this unique life.

Symbols

Objects such as displayed belongings of the person who died, crosses or other religious items, candles, and flowers give concrete form to our search for meaning in life and death.

Gathering

After the funeral, mourners gather to share memories, express what's on their minds and in their hearts, and support one another. Bonds are often strengthened, and mourners return home with a sense of community and love.

Actions

Funerals give mourners the opportunity to *do* something with their thoughts and feelings, such as lighting a candle, placing flowers on the casket, or participating in the procession to the cemetery.

3. What are Your Final Wishes?

In this section, discuss some of the in-depth details of the funeral and memorial service, which will help surviving family members confidently discuss final arrangements with the funeral home.

VISITATION/GATHERING

☐ Viewing/Visitation/Wake ☐ Open Casket ☐ Closed Casket ☐ Fellowship Meal/Gathering

A MEANINGFUL AND HEALING SERVICE

- ☐ Memorial Service (after burial or cremation)
- ☐ Funeral Service (before burial or cremation)
- ☐ Graveside Service (burial or cremation)



Location of Service _____

Eulogy Presented By _____

Other Speakers _____

FOCAL POINT FOR THE SERVICE

☐ Closed Casket ☐ Ceremonial Urn ☐ Framed Picture ☐ Other

Type of Casket _____

Type of Urn _____

Clothing Description _____

Jewelry ☐ On ☐ Off Give To _____

Embalming ☐ Yes ☐ No

Pallbearers _____

FINAL RESTING PLACE

Disposition ☐ Burial ☐ Cremation ☐ Body Donation

Cemetery Property Location _____ Purchased Lot? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, Lot/Niche Description Section _____ Lot No. _____ Space No. _____

Type of Cemetery Property ☐ Companion ☐ Individual ☐ Mausoleum ☐ Columbarium ☐ Other


Vault Type ☐ Steel ☐ Concrete Description _____

Permanent Memorial Marker ☐ Bronze ☐ Marble ☐ Granite ☐ Upright ☐ Ground Level

Inscription _____

Additional Information/Instructions _____

Memorial Contributions to _____



**If we allow ourselves
the grace that comes with
love, we must allow ourselves
the grace that is required
to mourn.**

DR. ALAN WOLFELT

4. Family & Friends

After a loss, family and friends need support and love from each other. Who do you want contacted after your passing?

FAMILY, FRIENDS, COMMUNITY MEMBERS, CO-WORKERS, AND NEIGHBORS

DEPENDENTS *In this space, share instructions for caring for dependents (including pets).*

GIFTING *If there are specific items you'd like to leave to family members or friends, note them here.*

Note: Individual circumstances and state laws vary, so any estate planning should only be undertaken with the help and assistance of an attorney licensed in your state.

5. Documents You May Need

In the coming days, you will need to make changes to legal documentation. Gather these documents to make the process a little easier.

DO YOU KNOW THE LOCATION OF THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS?

Will and/or Trusts ☐ Yes ☐ No Location(s) _____

Living Will ☐ Yes ☐ No Location(s) _____

Healthcare Directives ☐ Yes ☐ No Location(s) _____

Power of Attorney ☐ Yes ☐ No Location(s) _____

Usernames/Passwords ☐ Yes ☐ No Location(s) _____

Life Insurance Policies ☐ Yes ☐ No Location(s) _____

Beneficiaries Up to Date* ☐ Yes ☐ No

Funeral Arrangement Documents Location(s) _____

Bank Accounts ☐ Yes ☐ No Bank Name _____ Safe Deposit Box ☐ Yes ☐ No

Have you selected a funeral home provider**? ☐ Yes ☐ No Name _____

Military Discharge Documents _____

Additional Information _____

**If beneficiaries are not up to date, family members may have difficulty receiving life insurance proceeds.*

***Talk with your funeral home provider to let them know if you have an annuity, life insurance policy, group policy, or prearrangement policy to pay for funeral expenses.*



6. Things to Remember

After the death of a loved one, surviving family members will need to complete many of the following tasks. Use this checklist to ensure they have all the information they need to get everything done.

DO SURVIVING FAMILY MEMBERS HAVE...

- ☐ All the information they need to file insurance claims for each policy held? When possible, talk to your funeral home provider about an insurance assignment services company, which could expedite the availability of insurance funds.
- ☐ The information necessary to file appropriate health insurance claims and notify them of the death that has occurred? Survivors will need to notify home, business, and automobile insurance companies.
- ☐ Social Security information that will allow them to ask about benefits, appropriate forms, and procedures (1-800-772-1213)?
- ☐ Military discharge papers, if applicable? The Veterans Administration (www.va.gov) offers burial benefits to veterans, so ask your funeral director about appropriate forms and procedures (1-800-827-1000).
- ☐ The appropriate attorney's name and phone number so they can discuss probating the will and making other necessary filings?
- ☐ The information needed to transfer assets as appropriate? This includes titles on vehicle(s) and other titled property.
- ☐ Any usernames and passwords to digital accounts? Include online subscriptions, social media accounts, online financial accounts, websites or blogs, online businesses, and digital files, such as photos, videos, and documents.
- ☐ Bank contact information to revise or close out existing checking/savings accounts & safe deposit boxes, as needed?
- ☐ What they need to correct the tax identification number on any financial accounts held?
- ☐ Access and ability to cancel any direct deposit payments?
- ☐ Contact information for creditors, such as mortgages, personal loans, credit card companies, etc. so that all debts can be paid?
- ☐ Access to and knowledge of any money hidden in the home or elsewhere?
- ☐ All the information they need to create a meaningful final tribute and select any other memorial items, such as a grave marker? A grave marker is usually completed 6 to 12 months after the final tribute and surviving family members will need to know any preferences.



7. Vital Statistics

The funeral home staff will use this information to complete the legal paperwork required after a death occurs.



Full Legal Name

First _____ Middle _____ Last _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Sex _____ Race _____ Date of Birth ____/____/____

Birthplace City _____ State _____

Education Level Completed _____ Social Security Number _____

Spouse's Name (if wife, please give maiden name) _____

Father's Name First _____ Middle _____ Last _____

Birthplace of Father _____

Mother's Maiden Name First _____ Middle _____ Last _____

Birthplace of Mother _____

Veteran ☐ Yes ☐ No

For veterans, do you know the location of military discharge papers (DD-214)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Branch _____

Preceded in Death By _____

Primary Caregiver Name _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

***Don't forget to share this document with family members, your hospice social worker,
and your chosen funeral home.***



To learn more about hospice care and how it may greatly benefit your family, go to www.hospicebasics.org.



www.hospicebasics.org

We hope you found this guide valuable. If you have suggestions or comments, we'd love to hear from you. Simply [click here](#) to leave your feedback.