

WHAT CAN WE DO WHEN SOMEONE DIES?

As funeral directors, we are often asked, "What is the proper form of sympathy or condolence to extend to a grieving survivor?"

The following are suggestions of how you might show your support for someone who has lost a loved one:

- Do something. Doing nothing sends a message of apathy.
- Attend either the visitation, funeral, memorial, or graveside service. You don't have to attend all of the services. Sign the guest book. Some of the family may not have seen you, but will know that you attended after seeing your name.
- If you don't know what to say, simply say, "I'm sorry."
- Write a note. Personal notes recalling the deceased provide the family with great comfort. If you do not know their mailing address, check with the funeral home about forwarding your note to the family. (Because of privacy issues, do not depend on the funeral home to supply you with the family's address.)
- If a family requests memorials in lieu of flowers, honor their request. Some send flowers and also make a memorial gift. Flowers may be sent to the family's home. (Again, privacy issues prevent the funeral home from supplying you with the family's address.)
- If you know the family is going to have a large number of guests, take food to the home. It is best if this is an organized effort with others so as not to overwhelm the family with too much food and too little refrigerator space. Fresh food, fruits, and vegetables are an excellent alternative to prepared foods. Remember to use disposable dishes. The family will not want to worry with washing and returning your dish. Another helpful alternative to food is to provide disposable cups, plates, sodas, coffee, ice, etc.
- Offer your help, but be specific. Families are at a loss if you just say, "If there's anything you need, please call me." If you see a particular need - such as mowing the lawn, ferrying visitors to and from the airport, or even home repairs - make a specific offer.
- Note the date of death and honor the anniversary with a phone call or note. If you do not know what to say, "Thinking of you at this time," says it all. Because people tend to stop calling the bereaved a couple of weeks after the service, you should call again after three weeks, six weeks, three months, and longer.
- If you notice the survivor is not returning to their normal life, such as not eating, bathing, or avoiding personal interaction, it would be a good idea to check into some grief support groups and offer to attend the group function along with them.

"Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it."

-- Helen Keller