

Sympathy Etiquette in Different Religions

Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Protestant

About the Service: Most commonly take place at a funeral home. A minister will conduct the service with participation from family members.

What to Do: Visit the funeral home during visitor hours.

What To Send: Sending flowers, cards and charitable donations in the name of the deceased is an appropriate expression of your sympathy.



Roman Catholic

About the Service: A wake or viewing takes place in a funeral home within 48-72 hrs of death. A mass takes place approximately three days later at the church. The body is buried or cremated.

What to Do: Attend the wake and offer condolences. Attend the mass.

What To Send: Sympathy floor arrangements, standing arrangements, standing sprays, crosses, hearts. Food and fruit baskets can be sent to the home but not to the funeral home.

Muslim

About the Service: Burials are performed quickly and a service is conducted in a Mosque.

What to Do: If attending the service remember that men and women sit on separate sides of the Mosque and women have their heads covered.

What To Send: Flowers are not appropriate. Gifts of food are suitable expressions of sympathy.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon)

About the Service: The service includes prayers and music followed by a brief service at the graveside.

What to Do: If you attend the service, wear modest clothing.

What To Send: Flowers and sympathy cards are appropriate gestures to send.

Hindu

About the Service: Is held in either the home or funeral parlor. The body is wrapped in a shroud and flowers are placed at the feet of the deceased. Following the viewing, the body is cremated.

What to Do: Guests may attend the viewing but leave once the cremation takes place.

What To Send: Flowers are not an appropriate sentiment. Fruit is considered the best gift to convey sympathy.

Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform)

About the Service: A rabbi performs the service and the casket is taken to a cemetery and buried within twenty-four hours of death. Only immediate family attends the service.

What to Do: Once the body has been buried, the immediate family sits in mourning or “Shiva” in their home for the next seven days. It is customary for family, friends and coworkers to come by the home and pay their respects to the family. This is known as a Shiva call.

What To Send: Flowers are NOT appropriate for a Shiva call. Sweet fruit, desserts and food are appropriate gifts but check to see if the food is Kosher (i.e., prepared in accordance to Jewish dietary guidelines).

Buddhism

About the Service: There are three services: one held at the family home of the deceased within two days of death and permits the viewing of the deceased; a second is conducted 2-5 days later by monks at the funeral home; a third and final service is held 7 days after burial at the temple.

What to Do: Attend the first service and offer condolences to family. Do not wear red clothing.

What To Send: Flowers are appropriate but instruct the florist to refrain from using red flowers and instead use white, the color of mourning. Food gifts are not considered appropriate.

What about Cremations?

Many cremations have both a viewing and service prior to the cremation and flowers are considered an appropriate gesture at either event. If you are unsure what to send, check with either the funeral the funeral home or a member of the immediate family for guidance.