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# PLANNING A MEMORIAL SERVICE

## A GUIDE TO CREATING A SPECIAL END-OF-LIFE CELEBRATION

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Your loved one was special and you want their memorial to be memorable and unique as well. Whether you are considering organizing a memorial based on personal preference, cost savings, or geographic considerations, there are definite advantages:

### **More Options**

You have more alternatives as to where and when the memorial or end-of-life celebration is held; greater assurance you will get exactly what you want; expanded choices for items such as urns and memorialization items.

### **Make it Unique**

You choose the type and tone of the service. Whether it is a traditional service, party, or scattering ceremony, you can determine the best way to honor the person's life.

### **Save Money**

Self-organizing can drastically reduce or eliminate the cost of a service. Using a public or donated location, having family and friends speak instead of paying a chaplain are just a few alternatives.

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**“A GROWING TREND IS FOR  
FAMILIES TO ORGANIZE  
THEIR OWN MEMORIALS –  
DUE TO COST, TIMING, OR  
PERSONAL PREFERENCE,”  
DEWAYNE CAIN, aCREMATION  
FOUNDER.**

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## OVERVIEW

1. **Get organized:**  
Start a notebook and write down your ideas. Keep lists of what you need to do and notes about the plans you've made.
2. **Determine your budget:**  
If money is limited, then knowing your budget will simplify the decision-making. (For example, if you only have \$200 to spend, only consider locations that are free.)
3. **Reach out:**  
Talk to family and friends who might be willing to assist with the service. If you or your loved one was involved in a church or place of worship, contact them to see what might be available through pastoral care. Typically people are pleased and even honored to help research, prepare and participate.
4. **Get creative:**  
Personally-planned services offer unlimited, wonderful options for celebrating a loved one's life like they would have wanted. Pull together a few people who knew them best and spend time thinking creatively about the person and their life. Make lots of notes. Talk about what they liked to do, their hobbies, their favorite places to spend time, memorable or funny stories, the music they liked. Capture it all.
5. **Plan the ceremony (see enclosed worksheet):**  
This involves picking the location, time, format, presenters, and any tributes.

6. Notify family and friends:  
Let people know the date and time of the service. If you have a special request to make the service more specialized, be sure to include that information. (For example, please wear purple since it was her favorite color – or please bring a photo or two so it can be included in a scrapbook for the family.)
7. Check the list:  
Review the provided checklist and make sure you have discussed or completed each applicable area.
8. Post service:  
Traditionally, thank you notes should be sent to those who provided items or assisted with the service including those who bring food, send flowers or make a donation.

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## STEP-BY-STEP PLANNING

### Type of Service

- Do you want a viewing, visitation or wake? If so, do you want it at the crematory or at a home? There is a strong trend away from traditional viewings. You may want to show photos or provide a slide show of the person during special life moments instead.
- Do you want a traditional service or contemporary? Should it be solemn or casual, even light-hearted?
- Do you want a religious ceremony? If so, based on which religious customs?
- Should the service be public to all friends and acquaintances? Or would you prefer only family and closest friends?
- Do you want to encourage flowers being sent or prefer they make a donation? If a donation, then you need to identify what charity would best honor the deceased.
- Budget Tips:**
  - o Viewings and services done through a funeral home or crematory have additional costs (preparation of the body, facility usage, and staffing). Instead, consider a simple gathering time at a family home for people to visit with friends and relatives, without having the deceased's body present.
  - o If you want a formal viewing of the body, check into the possibility of casket rental instead of purchase.

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#### BUDGET TIPS

CONSIDER A SIMPLE  
GATHERING INSTEAD OF A  
TRADITIONAL SERVICE



CONSIDER VENUES THAT ARE  
LOW COST OR NO COST

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### Location of Service

- Determine where you would like the service and contact the location regarding availability and costs. Also inquire about available times. (For instance, some churches may not schedule late afternoon memorials if they have church services that evening.)
- If you or the deceased is affiliated with a local church, contact them about facility use and possible involvement from a minister.
- Will you scatter the remains as part of the service? (This may help determine the service location.)
- Consider favorite places including:
  - o Church
  - o Vacation spots
  - o Parks
  - o Restaurants
  - o Hobby-related locations
  - o Winery

- 🍃 Don't rule out locations because they "aren't normal". These can be the most special. Ideas: sports stadium, zoo, fishing dock, hiking/biking trail, bowling alley, college campus, or coffee house.
- 🍃 One good way to research locations is to search the Internet for wedding venues. The same places that are ideal for weddings also work well for memorial services.
- 🍃 **Budget Tips:**
  - Many places charge a facility usage fee for a private room or chapel. However some places may waive this if there is a personal connection to you or the deceased.
  - City parks can be wonderful locations. Most cities offer pavilion reservations at very affordable rates. This typically provides basic shade/shelter as well as an easy way to inform attendees where to meet.

## Timing

- 🍃 Determine what day and time works best for you and the attendees. Consider travel costs for last-minute tickets as well as allowing necessary time for the cremation to occur if you wish to have the remains present.
- 🍃 Do you want to hold the service immediately or wait until the remains are present? Cremation paperwork and authorizations can take several days, frequently resulting from the doctor not immediately signing the death certificate, or the additional paperwork required is a Medical Examiner is involved. It is recommended to not finalize the date until after the cremation occurs if you want to ensure the remains are present at the service.
- 🍃 If you have people traveling from out of town, what will work best for them? One of the advantages of cremation is you can schedule it for the time that is most appropriate. It is perfectly acceptable to wait until a family reunion or get-together so more people can participate.

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## TIMING

IF YOU WANT THE REMAINS AT THE SERVICE, WAIT UNTIL AFTER THE CREMATION TO FINALIZE THE DATE

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## Location of Remains & Urns

- 🍃 Where will the remains be placed? Will you want a decorative urn for display?
- 🍃 Is there a family plot in a cemetery? Has a niche in a mausoleum already been purchased?
- 🍃 Do you want to scatter the ashes at sea or in a favorite vacation spot?
- 🍃 What alternative permanent memorials could you consider instead of a traditional headstone?
  - Park bench with engraved plate
  - Tree planting at a park or school with engraved plaque
  - Scholarship fund in the deceased name
- 🍃 **Budget Tips:**
  - You do not need to purchase an urn, especially if you are going to bury or scatter the remains.
  - Be creative. If you wish to display the remains during the memorial, think of special items that could be used which already exist. Examples include:
    - For an avid sewer – use her sewing basket
    - For the fisherman – use their favorite tackle box
    - For a carpenter – use a handmade wooden box

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## BUDGET TIPS

CONSIDER OPTIONS OTHER THAN A TRADITIONAL HEADSTONE OR PLAQUE



ASK CLOSE FAMILY & FRIENDS TO HELP OFFSET COSTS IN LIEU OF FLOWERS

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## Budget

- Determine how much you have to spend. Take into consideration if money had been set aside by the deceased to pay for a service.
- If money is a big concern, consider possible options for paying expenses. Many families reach out to other family members and pool their resources.
- Should there be little or no money available but you still would like to have a memorial service, read the section on No Cost / Low Cost Memorials.

## Ideas for Personalization

- Guestbook: You can purchase a formal guestbook. However, a nice notebook from a craft store will also be sufficient. Simply write in the basic information (deceased's name, birth date and date of passing).
- Photos: This can be as complex as having photos projected onto a wall or screen with background music or as simple as putting them out on a table or bulletin board. Be sure to include action/location photos to provide a wonderful glimpse of that person living their life such as vacation photos or working in a garden. Help guests see your loved one during their happiest times.
- Flowers: Provide a bouquet of the deceased's favorite flowers or a simple, elegant single flower and vase.
- Mementos: If the person collected things, consider displaying part of their collection (For example: baseball hats, stamps, figurines, paintings).

## Organizing the Service:

- Create an outline of how you would like the service to flow. Make sure everyone speaking knows how long they should speak and if there are areas you do not want discussed.
- Pick a "master of ceremony" to ensure the service runs smoothly. This may be a minister or close friend.
- Considering including family, close friends, and children when appropriate. For example, children can write and read a letter about the loved one, read scripture or share a special poem.
- Think about music both before the service and during it. Comforting hymns or the deceased favorite music are appropriate.
- If you are having a large group of people, you may want to ask a couple of people to welcome guests and help them get seated.
- Programs are sometimes used but it really is up to personal preference. Typically there will be a family member or friend that can produce a simple version using free templates from the Internet.

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### BUDGET TIP

USE A FREE ONLINE ONLINE  
TO CREATE A PROGRAM FOR  
THE SERVICE AND PRINT  
THEM AT AN OFFICE  
SUPPLY STORE

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## Who to Invite

- Below is a suggested list of people to notify after you know the time and date of the service. It is appropriate to ask another family member or friend to contact people about the service if you choose. If you are holding a public service, consider including service times in their online obituary.
  - Spouse and children
  - Parents
  - Siblings
  - Minister or church they attended
  - Friends
  - Business associates
  - School alumni association
  - Organizations they belonged to

## Obituaries

- Memorializing a loved one through an obituary is a loving way to honor their life and achievements. A complimentary online listing of your loved one's death may be provided as part of a standard cremation.
- Professionally written obituaries tell the story of a life and express their personality. This is done by a combination of biography material and talking with people who knew them.
- Submission to newspapers can be done by the family and save the service fee typically charged by the funeral home.
- Budget Tips:**
  - Printed obituaries are priced by the line and can get expensive very quickly.
  - Consider using an online obituary you can link to on Facebook or Twitter.
  - Contact the deceased's alumni association and other groups where they were members. Frequently they will include a brief obituary at no charge.

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### BUDGET TIP

PROVIDE AN ONLINE  
OBITUARY INSTEAD OF  
PAYING FOR A PRINTED  
NEWSPAPER LISTING

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## Low Cost / No Cost Memorials

- Below are some ideas that can be done for little or no cost.
  - Hold the service in a public park or family home.
  - Use family members and friends instead of a chaplain. (Note: Many chaplains do not charge to do a service although an honorarium is typically provided.)
  - Consider having a private scattering of the remains instead of a public service.
  - If having a private family service, consider hosting a potluck meal for family instead of trying to pay for a meal.

## The Day of the Service

- Look your best.
- Remember you are there to celebrate a life and try to relax.
- Accept help from family and friends.
- Make sure you have Kleenex.
- Don't worry if everything is not "perfect". People are there to support you and they will appreciate what you have done.

## Memorial Service Worksheet

### Initial Planning

<b>Type of Service</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Gathering <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Other	
<b>Location of Service</b>	
<b>Timing and Days/Hours</b>	
<b>Permanent Location of Remains</b>	
<b>Budget</b>	
<b>Ideas for Personalization</b>	
<b>Invitees</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private	
<b>Obituary Writing &amp; Submission</b>	
<b>Requested Charity</b>	
<b>Flowers for Service (if desired)</b>	
<b>Guest Book</b>	
<b>Service Programs</b>	
<b>Special Requests</b>	
<b>Additional Notes</b>	

## Memorial Service Worksheet (continued)

### Service Details

Contacts	Facility Contact	Facilitator
	Name	Name
	Contact Information	Contact Information

Eulogy (who will be speaking)		
Name	Name	Name
Contact Information	Contact Information	Contact Information
Music Selections (include who is responsible for coordinating)		
Readings (specify what the reading is and who will be reading it)		