



QUALTRAIN AUSTRALIA

Ongoing Professional Development

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Registered Training Organisation Provider Number 51465

Resources for registered marriage celebrants:

- Guidelines on the Marriage Act 1961 Version 4 July 2018
 - The Guidelines provide essential information on the solemnisation of marriage in Australia – the most accurate information and guidance available.
- Marriage Act 1961
- Marriage Regulations 2017
- Information and resources for celebrants available on the Attorney-General's website:
<https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/resources-marriage-celebrants>

QualTrain encourages registered marriage celebrants to regularly review the Guidelines and the resources on the Attorney-General's website.

QualTrain recommends membership to a celebrant association/network. A list of associations can be found on the Attorney-General's website: <https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/resources-marriage-celebrants/networks-associations-celebrants>

Information in this OPD workbook has been reviewed and approved by MLCS. The information is updated regularly and is correct at the time of printing. Where case studies appear in workbooks, they are examples only and any comparison made with other persons either living or deceased is purely coincidental.

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*Thank you for choosing QualTrain
We hope you enjoy your OPD activities*

RE: important information regarding fulfilling 2021 OPD obligations as per Section 39G of the Marriage Act.

Please read the following information thoroughly:

To complete your OPD (4-hour component) in accordance with section 39G of the Marriage Act **you are required to:**

1. **spend a minimum of two-hours reading through the learning material prior to attending the Zoom session.** Your trainer will ask you questions in relation to the learning material to gain assurance that you have read the material. Asking appropriate questions as well as sharing your own experiences will satisfy the trainer that you have completed the two-hour self-paced study component
2. attend the two-hour webinar (a zoom link will be sent to you prior to the webinar)

If you cannot satisfy the trainer that you have spent the appropriate amount of time reading through the learning material, you will be transferred to OPD online, where you will need to complete a formal test for each activity.

As we have had a small number of celebrants not able to satisfy the trainer that they have spent two-hours reading through the learning material, QualTrain has created a questionnaire to prompt celebrants to ask questions. The questionnaire is available in downloads section. **Please complete the questionnaire, print or save a copy ready for use during the webinar.**

OPD Activity 21QT022 The Dynamics of Dying and Bereavement 1 hour

At the end of this activity participants will have learned to address the specific needs of bereaved family and friends when interviewing them following the death of their loved one. In order to conduct interviews in an empathic and appropriate manner, a celebrant needs to understand how death affects the bereaved, particularly in relation to the type of death, ie sudden and unexpected, peaceful and expected, death of a child, suicide etc. The activity will focus on the need for developing good listening and interpersonal skills required for interviewing the bereaved.

This activity relates to elements from CHCCCS017 Provide loss and grief support – a unit of competency from CHC41015 Certificate IV in Celebrancy

Recognising reactions to loss and grief

The impact of specific loss(es) and common features of grief, trauma and bereavement on the individual, family and community.

No two people react exactly alike to a loss and there are very significant cultural differences. For many, however, the most immediate response to the death of a loved one is shock, numbness, and a sense of disbelief.

Of all life experiences, bereavement is considered to be the most traumatic for families and marital partners. Whenever or however it occurs, a death in the family can require significant emotional and social adjustment.

As the anthropologists have shown, people in different cultures react to death in different ways. Our reactions in the West have often been thought to 'deny' death; we are seen as maintaining a 'stiff upper lip' attitude about it. Death is a universal experience and happens in families every day.

Bereavement involves a deep sense of shock. Those who experience it are often unable to come to terms with their loss and are unable to make the necessary adjustments to their lives.

Death occurs in different ways and in a variety of circumstances

Sudden – Examples: traffic accident, heart attack, suicide

Violent – Examples: murder, casualty of war, plane crash

Gradual – Examples: a long illness, Alzheimer's

Ambiguous – Examples: suspicious circumstances, lost at sea

Expected – Examples: cancer or similar illness, old age

Reactions to Death

Reactions to death and processes of bereavement within the family vary according to the particular relationship that is involved. For example, the loss of a wife or husband,

while perhaps no less traumatic than the loss of a child, will probably result in a different process of emotional and social adjustment.

Equally, the loss of a sibling may be registered quite differently from the loss of a grandparent. Although bereavement is felt uniquely by each person in the family, the particular relationship the individual had with the deceased person inevitably colours the experience of bereavement.

Impact of Specific Loss

The degree of sense of loss of a loved one, *specific* to a range of individuals will vary, for example:

The death of a child will impact differently on the child's ...
Parent(s), Sibling(s), School friends, Teachers, Neighbours,

The Process of Grief

The process of grieving in response to a significant loss requires time, patience, courage, and support. The grieving person will likely experience many changes throughout the process. These processes are described below.

Shock is often the initial reaction to loss. Shock is the person's emotional protection from being too suddenly overwhelmed by the loss. The grieving person may feel stunned, numb, or in disbelief concerning the loss. While in shock the person may not be able to make even simple decisions.

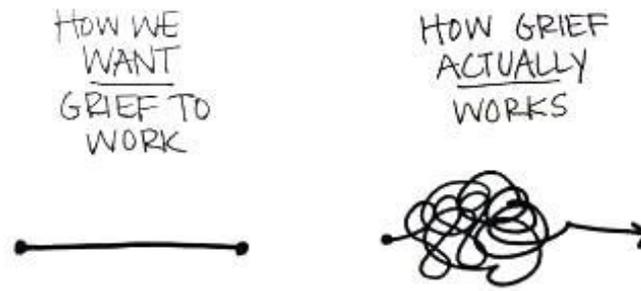
Friends and family may need to simply sit, listen, and assist with the person's basic daily needs. Shock may last a matter of minutes, hours, or (in severely traumatic losses) days.

Suffering is the long period of grief during which the person gradually comes to terms with the reality of the loss. The suffering process typically involves a wide range of feelings, thoughts, and behaviours, as well as an overall sense of life seeming **chaotic and disorganised**.

The duration of the suffering process differs with each person, partly depending on the nature of the loss experienced.

Recovery is the turning point. Individuals experiencing grief from a loss may choose a variety of ways of expressing it. No two people will respond to the same loss in the same way. It is important to note that phases of grief exist; however, they do not depict a specific way to respond to loss.

Stages of grief reflect a variety of reactions that may surface as an individual makes sense of how this loss affects them. Experiencing and accepting all feelings remains an important part of the healing process.



Myths About Children's Grief

There are many myths that surround the way children grieve. For example:

Young children do not grieve.

Children grieve at any age, but their grief manifests in different ways according to their age, developmental stage and life experience. Children often grieve intensely for a period and will then just switch off. Their break from grieving usually takes the form of play, which adults often mistake as a sign that the child is not grieving.

Children should, or should not, go to funerals.

Whether a child goes to a funeral should be their choice – a choice made based on information and support. Each child will handle their loss differently and for while for some children it may be beneficial to attend the funeral, others will not want to.

Children recover quickly from a loss.

Both adults and children will learn to live with loss and adapt to a new reality without their loved one, but no one ever fully gets over a significant loss. For children in particular, the loss may be revisited at different stages of development as they grow up, and the grief may arise again strongly.

Children should always be encouraged to talk about their grief.

It is important to encourage and support children to talk about their loss if they want to. However, other approaches like art, play, writing, music and dance may also allow children to express their emotions in a less confronting way.

Children will be permanently scarred by the death of a loved one.

Children are resilient, and with continuing support can deal with their grief appropriately. Sometimes a significant loss can affect a child's development, and if you are concerned about this, talk to a health professional who may be able to recommend counselling.

It's important to be strong for the children and not show emotion.

It's fine to cry in front of the children, especially if you explain to them why you are angry or sad. Saying something like "I'm crying because Dad died and I miss him" shows your child that it's all right to talk about your feelings and they are not alone.

DISCUSSION POINT DURING WEBINAR... SHARE EXPERIENCES

Normal Grief

A normal reaction to loss involves physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and spiritual reactions and often includes the following:

- ***Anticipatory grief*** – when a life limiting illness is diagnosed – continues throughout the illness phase
- ***Acute grief*** – the immediate reaction to the death – which may include severe shock, numbness, agitation, anger, palpitations, fatigue, forgetfulness
- ***Ongoing grief*** – the struggle experienced over time to adjust to life without the loved one – may include insomnia, poor appetite, apathy, anxiety, social withdrawal, sadness, lack of direction, anger
- ***Resolution or recovery*** is characterised largely by the bereaved person having found a way to integrate the loss into their daily life along with a sense of renewed meaning and purpose in their life again

The majority of people appear to be able to cope with their grief, as above, and reach resolution/recovery with the support of their own natural support networks and local community services. Grief counselling for people experiencing normal grief may not in fact be helpful or necessary.

Where there is little or no identified bereavement risk, families/caregivers should be offered basic information on loss and grief, access to general bereavement support and contact numbers for local bereavement follow-up services should they require it at a later stage.

Complicated Grief

Ten – twenty per cent of bereaved people experience complicated grief in varying degrees. While some people present with obvious complicated grief symptoms such as severe depression or suicidal ideation, many people can go unnoticed without conducting a bereavement risk assessment. Indicators of complicated grief include the following:

- Extreme and ongoing resistance to accepting painful reality of the loss
- Persistent and disturbing beliefs about the death
- Marked impairment of sleep

- Impaired capacity to work
- Impairment of social functioning – including withdrawal from family and friends
- Persistent and prolonged distress that lasts for longer than six months
- Very limited or absent interest and engagement in life
- Integration of the loss does not occur, moving on with life seems impossible

Identified longer term health outcomes for the people experiencing complicated grief include clinical depression and anxiety disorders. These people need to be identified and referred earlier, rather than later, to specific bereavement interventions and on-going follow-up as required. These interventions are intended to minimise adverse longer-term health outcomes.

Disenfranchised Grief

Disenfranchised grief occurs when a person's heart is grieving but they can't talk about or share their pain with others because it is considered unacceptable to others. It occurs when they believe they are or entitled or worthy of expressing their grief. It may occur because love for the object of their grief isn't recognised, or because others don't understand. Examples of disenfranchised grief :

- *Your relationship is not recognized by others because they didn't know you had a close relationship*
- This can occur when there is a miscarriage; a friendship not known to the family; caregivers such as a health professional when a patient dies; or the family knows about the relationship, but doesn't know how close it was.
- *Your loss isn't a person*
- Examples that fall in this category are beloved animals, failed marriage,, unfulfilled dreams, a financial loss or business loss, a loss of health, the loss of a loved one's functioning (such as in the case of Alzheimer's).
- *Your relationship was real, but the family (or members of society) would not or does not approve*
- This can occur if there is a non-traditional relationship such as a homosexual relationship, especially when the person who died wasn't out or if there is discrimination in the family. It can also occur if a family member is estranged. A stigmatized relationship like an extra-marital affair or when a woman has an abortion are other examples of this.
- *The way the person died is not as supported as other deaths*
- This occurs when the death or the deceased person's actions while alive are stigmatized by society as with deaths from suicide, a drug overdose, AIDS, a war, violence, or alcoholism. Sometimes a death of a person who had a long life is more discounted than someone younger.
- *You aren't grieving how people expect*
- This can happen when the way a person acts in your grief is unsettling or confusing to someone else. If they are "too upset" or "not upset enough" or the grief is "lasting too long" are only a few examples of this.

DISCUSSION POINT DURING WEBINAR... SHARE EXPERIENCES

The impact of specific loss on families

Within families it is generally assumed that there will automatically be support for one another when grief, trauma or bereavement occurs. Family resilience is fostered by shared beliefs that help members make meaning of crisis situations; facilitate a positive and hopeful outlook; provide transcendent or spiritual values and purpose. Family members' distress can be contextualised as being normal, expected and understandable; softening reactions and reducing shame, blame and guilt.

Affirming the strength of unity within the family helps to counter a sense of hopelessness, failure and despair and reinforces pride, confidence and courage. One of the strongest purposes of the family structure is to reassure and protect children and other vulnerable family members by reflecting leadership, security and dependability.

Coming to terms with death or loss is one of the most painful situations to confront the family.

What kind of specific losses affect the family?

- Anticipated death, perhaps in later years of life or after a long illness.
- Families have the opportunity to discuss the impending death, allowing members to voice their different feelings, resolve conflict on sensitive issues and make collaborative decisions.
- Divorce or separation

Families have the opportunity to work through and learn from this adversity; encourage family members to share their stories, often eliminating the silence or secrecy around painful or shameful events, building mutual support and empathy.

Examples of other specific losses which affect the family may create serious challenges to the family unit:

- Discovery that a family member has committed a serious crime
- Job/income loss of a family member in a leading role
- A change in a member's sexual preference

Each family has its own diversity to manage:

- Religious or spiritual reactions to the death or loss
- Varying levels of adherence to ethnic or cultural practices
- Range of feelings for love or loss
- Different levels of tolerance incorporating anger or remorse
- Capacity to accept the change, to reorganise and restructure the family leadership

Engage Empathically

Grief may trigger behavioural change; the bereaved person may display symptoms of becoming:

- Aggressive
- Withdrawn/passive
- Reckless or self-destructive
- Hyperactive

Cognitive reactions to grief

- Reduced attention span: inability to follow a conversation, to read and to stay focused; this affects many on the job regarding performance; forgetfulness.
- Loss-centred thinking: focus of much of the individual's thought process to the point of becoming totally obsessed
- Impaired self esteem
- Idealisation of the past, of the future and of the individual and the relationship lost
- Exaggerations in magical thinking (I made it happen)

Emotional reactions to grief

- Self-blame and guilt: "I could have..," "I shouldn't have...," "If only...,"
- Fears: of getting through each day; of being alone; of being a single parent; "What will I do now?"; of the dark; of new places and of old favourite places.
- Helplessness/Hopelessness.
- Anger: at life's situation, at God, at unfairness, at the one who died, at others for being happy.
- Yearning/desiring the lost loved one and the world that was.
- Withdrawn; not sharing feelings with others because they don't understand or "get it," not able to give emotionally to others—even family members.

Common reactions to loss

- Denial, numbness and shock.
- Shock serves to protect the individual from experiencing the intensity of the loss.
- Numbness is a normal reaction to an immediate loss and should not be confused with "lack of caring".
- Denial and disbelief will diminish as the individual slowly acknowledges the impact of this loss and accompanying feelings.
- Bargaining.

- At times, individuals may ruminate about what could have been done to prevent the loss.
- Individuals can become preoccupied about ways that things could have been better, imagining all the things that will never be.

This reaction can provide insight into the impact of the loss; however, if not properly resolved, intense feelings of remorse or guilt may hinder the healing process.

Depression

- After recognising the true extent of the loss, some individuals may experience depressive symptoms.
- Sleep and appetite disturbance, lack of energy and concentration, and crying spells are some typical symptoms.
- Feelings of loneliness, emptiness, isolation, and self-pity can also surface during this phase, contributing to this reactive depression.
- For many, this phase must be experienced in order to begin reorganising one's life.

Anger

- This reaction usually occurs when an individual feels helpless and powerless.
- Anger may result from feeling abandoned, occurring in cases of loss through death.
- Feelings of resentment may occur toward one's higher power or toward life in general for the injustice of this loss.
- After an individual acknowledges anger, guilt may surface due to expressing these negative feelings.
- Again, these feelings are natural and should be honoured to resolve the grief.

Acceptance

- Time allows the individual an opportunity to resolve the range of feelings that surface.
- The grieving process supports the individual. That is, healing occurs when the loss becomes integrated into the individual's set of life experiences.
- Individuals may return to some of the earlier feelings throughout one's lifetime.
- There is no time limit to the grieving process. Each individual should define one's own healing process.

Aspects of Personal Loss

- Part of the Self: That which was given to the other in love, care, concern, is immediately altered in sudden death. The unique relationship has changed; the energy from one to the other is now severed. The individual does not feel whole.

- **Loss of Self-Confidence:** Because the individual has difficulty seeing him/herself as a whole person he/she experiences feelings of inadequacy, which may lead to indecision.
- **Family Structure:** The family unit undergoes forced change due to the loss of a family member. The role(s) lost here must be addressed on a daily basis. Not only do we grieve the personality lost but all the roles and expected behaviours that became so much a part of daily living.
- **Lifestyle:** Sudden death forces a change in marital status. Many individuals have not chosen to be "single" again; to be a single parent with all the responsibilities of raising children alone.
- **Loss of the Future and Dreams:** Survivors and the deceased had seen and planned a particular future. That is now gone and the survivor is often directionless for a time. The future is now uncertain and viewed as an obstacle; dreams are dashed regarding spending time with that individual and/or watching him/her grow and succeed.
- **Social Changes:** Often survivors now relate differently to friends, acquaintances, and even family members—including in-laws. Because many individuals are unsure of how to relate to the survivor, they step back and often avoid the individual

*When a body is not recovered, then complications will occur in the mourning process. Verification and proof of the death are concrete ways of making the loss real. Rituals may need to be developed to assist the mourner to move beyond this uncertainty.

DISCUSSION POINT DURING WEBINAR... SHARE EXPERIENCES

The Celebrant's Role When Interviewing the Bereaved

When talking to the bereaved we must be aware of all the knowledge gained about them and of their experiences prior to the death and since it happened. We need to be aware of the range of normality and of the potential for the bereaved to be traumatized. If celebrants are not aware of these factors prior to the interview, we will not be adequately prepared.

Special needs for children in the grief process

When speaking with children in the grief process, it is important to communicate:

- Clear, prompt and accurate information about the death.
- Reliable, comforting, care after the death.
- Encouragement to join in the family grieving.

Active Listening

The following skills are ways to demonstrate to people that you are paying close attention, that you care, and that you are actively listening.

- Maintain eye contact
- Allow your face to reflect genuine caring
- Avoid any gestures that hide your face from view
- Be attentive and relaxed, and use positive gestures
- Orient your body toward the person who is speaking
- Sit on the same level (around a dining table is best)
- Create an “open” body posture: legs and arms uncrossed, body upright and centred
- Use a natural vocal style – speak in a relaxed, warm manner

Conversation

- Stay on the topic. Don't topic jump or interrupt
- Give the time he/she needs. Don't rush to respond
- Take time to pause/moments of silence to reflect
- Use Open-ended questions and paraphrasing
- Focus on using key words of the individual and then saying back to them the most significant things that are said to you.

Avoid Non-Supportive Verbal Questioning

- Responding too quickly
- Changing the subject
- Talking too much about yourself
- Giving advice
- Preaching, placating, lecturing
- Over-interpreting
- Asking too many questions
- Interrupting silence
- Allowing the individual to ramble on.

Avoid Non-Supportive Body Language

- Rigid severe posture
- Taking notes
- Clock watching
- Letting your gaze wander

Approaches to avoid

Accept that there is nothing you can say to make them feel better about their loss. Approaches to avoid include:

- Telling them about your grief experience instead of listening to theirs.
- Comparing their grief with yours or anyone else's.
- Describing the 'stages of grief' and suggesting they're not moving through the stages quickly enough.
- Telling them they're grieving in the 'wrong' way.
- Giving them unsolicited advice about how they can best get over their loss.
- Reasoning with them about how they should or shouldn't feel.

Comments to avoid

It's a natural reaction to want to ease the person's pain. However, well-meaning words that encourage the bereaved to 'look on the bright side' can be hurtful. The type of comments that should be avoided include:

- Never appear flippant or use placations like "I know how you feel" – to the bereaved – you don't!
- 'You'll get married again one day.'
- 'At least you have your other children.'
- 'She's lucky she lived to such a ripe old age.'
- 'You can always try for another baby.'
- 'He's happy in heaven.'
- 'Be thankful they're not in pain anymore.'
- 'Try to remember the good times.'
- 'You'll feel better soon.'
- 'Time heals all wounds.'
- 'Count your blessings, you still have a lot to be grateful for.'
- 'You've got to pull yourself together and be strong.'

Never make amusing comments to attempt to lighten the burden of the bereaved.

Use positive language

Consider carefully what words you will use:

- Your greeting – avoid saying 'Good morning/afternoon' when meeting the family and when opening the ceremony.
- Words of encouragement.
- Words you will use as you are leaving.

Listen with compassion

The most important help you could offer is a willing ear. Allow the bereaved person to talk and express their grief in whichever way they need. This may include crying, fits of

anger, screaming, laughing, expressions of guilt or regret, or engaging in activities that reduce their stress such as walking or gardening.

Suggestions include:

- Concentrate your efforts on listening carefully and with compassion.
- Everyone's experience of grief is unique, so let them grieve their own way.
- Don't judge or dispute their responses.
- Criticising the way they express their grief is hurtful and will make them less likely to share their feelings with you.
- If they don't feel like talking, don't press them.

DISCUSSION POINT DURING WEBINAR... SHARE EXPERIENCES

How should a celebrant react when confronted with bereavement risk or complicated grief?

Good funeral celebrants are dedicated to assisting families in bereavement to provide a deeply meaningful, sincere and significant funeral ceremony for their loved one. The majority of celebrants however, are not formally trained in grief management. Therefore, the most appropriate action for a celebrant to take in these situations is:

- Remain calm and professional whilst offering sympathetic responses
- Do not issue the bereaved person with brochures or contact numbers for counsellors
- If it is impossible to continue with the interview, leave and report immediately to the Funeral director

DISCUSSION POINT DURING WEBINAR... SHARE EXPERIENCES

Where the Bereaved May Find Help

Grieving individuals may need to be encouraged to:

- Recall humorous events
- List qualities of the deceased person that impacted upon them
- Review the time/events important to both
- Review the struggles in the relationship
- Identify change in self due to that other individual in their life...how did I change for the good?
- Identify how the deceased changed because I was part of their life.
- List favourite foods, scents, events, holidays, etc. so you never forget

Practice Rituals of Remembrance:

- Plant flowers, a tree or a flowering bush in memory of your loved one
- Light a candle and recall the comfort or guiding light he/she was for you
- Read articles, excerpts from favourite books, poetry
- Play music appreciated by your loved one
- Collect photographs and photo albums that focus on shared times and memories.
- Display a piece of jewellery that was a favourite of the person.
- Wear cologne or perfume he/she liked on you.
- Wear an item of clothing given to you by him/her.
- Tell some favourite stories
- Travel to a place he/she enjoyed or always desired to visit.
- Review how your life is better because he/she was a part of it.

Available resources include:

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au>

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief-loss/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm>

<https://www.suiceline.org.au/worried-about-someone/recognising-suicide-warning-signs/>

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/what-do-following-death>

<http://www.healthdirect.gov.au/end-of-life-health>

<https://www.moneysmart.gov.au/life-events-and-you/life-events/losing-your-partner>

NOTES

OPD Activity 21QT019 Plan and Develop Personalised Funeral and Memorial Ceremonies 3 hours

At the end of this activity participants will have learned to address the specific needs of the bereaved when crafting personalised, meaningful and accurate funeral and memorial ceremonies as a funeral celebrant.

The topics that will be covered in this activity relate to elements from CHCCEL008 Plan, present and evaluate funeral and memorial ceremonies **and include:**

Use communication that acknowledges and respects client loss and grief issues;

- Gather information about the deceased in a sensitive manner as a basis for ceremony content;
- Identify key loss and grief related issues required for input of the celebrant at various points in the ceremony;
- Reflect on and use information provided about the deceased to develop ceremonial elements;
- Develop eulogy or integrate life story into ceremony based on client wishes and information;
- Refine and finalise content in consultation with client;
- Identify and organise required resources.



*Nothing lasts for long.
Keep that in mind and rejoice.*

*Our life is not the one old burden; our path is not the one long journey.
One sole poet has not to sing one aged song.
The flower fades and dies; but he who wears the flower has not to mourn for it forever.
Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.*

*There must come a full pause to weave perfection into music.
Life droops toward its sunset to be drowned in the golden shadows.
Love must be called from its play to drink sorrow and be borne to the heaven of tears.
Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.*

*We hasten to gather our flowers lest they are plundered by the passing winds.
It quickens our blood and brightens our eyes to snatch kisses that would vanish if we delayed.
Our life is eager, our desires are keen, for time tolls the bell of parting.
Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.*

*There is not time for us to clasp a thing and crush it and fling it away to the dust.
The hours trip rapidly away, hiding their dreams in their skirts.
Our life is short; it yields but a few days for love.
Were it for work and drudgery it would be endlessly long.
Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.*

*Beauty is sweet to us, because she dances to the same fleeting tune with our lives.
Knowledge is precious to us, because we shall never have time to complete it.
All is done and finished in the eternal Heaven.
But earth's flowers of illusion are kept eternally fresh by death.
Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.*

From 'The Gardener LXVIII': 'None Live for Ever, Brother' by Rabindranath Tagore

INTRODUCTION

In this activity we are going to focus on how to develop personalised funeral and memorial ceremonies.

Question: What is the difference between a funeral and a memorial service?

Answer:

A **Funeral Service** is a **service** held to memorialize a deceased person with their body present. A **Memorial Service** is a **service** held to memorialize a deceased person with their body not present.

Question: Have you attended at least one funeral or memorial service during your lifetime? Have you **conducted** one or more funeral and/or memorial services?

In a few words, how would you best describe your feelings and/or experiences of conducting a funeral service? If you haven't conducted a service at this stage, please

write down how you think you might feel about being the celebrant at a funeral or memorial service. *You may like to share your experiences during the webinar*

Working with people in grief requires some very special attributes. When you visit the family for the initial interview you will more than likely be meeting people for the first time, people who will look to you for guidance and support in their time of need.

Question: When considering the importance of the role of the funeral celebrant, what do you think might be some of best attributes of the funeral celebrant? Discuss with members of your small group and make some notes.

Attributes of a Funeral Celebrant

- A positive attitude – let the family know that you are there to assist them in creating the ceremony to honour their loved one and that you will offer them your professional advice
- An empathetic listener – you are there to extract valuable information to create the ceremony, the interview should also have some therapeutic value for the bereaved family
- Compassionate and understanding – this is obviously essential, the circumstances of the death may not always be straightforward, families may be in shock and you will require patience and tolerance at times
- Non-judgemental – you will meet families where anger and guilt play a part in their grief, or they may have very different views to your own, do not get drawn into judging either the deceased, or members of the family
- Well presented – your first impressions count – the way you dress and speak will be noticed by the family
- Punctual – make sure you arrive early for the interview and have time to prepare yourself before you walk in
- A good time-keeper – Don't let the conversation get away, bring the family back to focus on the important issues

- Dedicated to your work – don't get side-tracked, remember that your purpose is to create and present the ceremony on behalf of the family
- Creative writing skills – in order to create a quality ceremony to truly honour the deceased
- Excellent public speaking skills – diction, pace, pause and pitch are all important
- Computer skills – you will need to create a draft for the family and present the family with a final copy of the ceremony
- Management skills – efficiency is important in maintaining appointments
- Good driving skills – GPS and reliable vehicle
- Your health is important – maintain your health, don't arrive tired or unwell to the interview with the bereaved family and friends.

Funeral Service

Prepare to interview the bereaved family and/or friends

Step one in the process of crafting a meaningful and personalised funeral ceremony for a deceased person, is to speak with the bereaved family and/or friends.

The celebrant will receive a call from a funeral home checking for the celebrant's availability and if all is well, the funeral arranger will give the celebrant the details of the deceased and a contact number for the next of kin, or executor (when the deceased had no family).

It is then the celebrant's role to make arrangements to meet with the family by making an arrangement for the interview.

Many celebrants work independently of funeral homes, particularly those who are experienced funeral celebrants. In this case, the celebrant may well know the family and the deceased. The celebrant will receive a call directly from the family inviting him/her to come to meet with them about the funeral.

The celebrant should arrive at the interview well prepared with:

- Checklist where you have recorded the arrangements supplied by the funeral director
- Details regarding day/date/time/location of the service
- List of people who will be present at the interview and those significant others who may not be able to attend
- A collection of sample texts - readings, poems, religious and non-religious options, ideas for ritual and symbol
- An outline of the order of ceremony

- Writing materials and notebook OR some celebrants prefer to take a small laptop. It is not recommended to record the conversation (privacy issues)
- Celebrant's business card with their contact details (not a marriage celebrant card)
- Most importantly – a list of questions to extract important information regarding the life of the deceased

Discuss the points above during the webinar – share knowledge and experience.

The following important skills should be practiced in readiness for the interview with the bereaved. Your trainer will lead discussion on the following points.

Active Listening

The following skills are ways to demonstrate to people that you are paying close attention, that you care, and that you are actively listening.

- Maintain eye contact
- Allow your face to reflect genuine caring
- Avoid any gestures that hide your face from view
- Be attentive and relaxed, and use positive gestures
- Orient your body toward the person who is speaking
- Sit on the same level (around a dining table is best)
- Create an open body posture: legs and arms uncrossed, body upright and centred
- Use a natural vocal style – speak in a relaxed, warm manner

Conversation

- Stay on the topic. Don't topic jump or interrupt
- Give the time he/she needs. Don't rush to respond
- Take time to pause/use moments of silence to reflect
- Use open-ended questions and paraphrasing
- Focus on using key words of the individual and then saying back to them the most significant things that are said to you.

Avoid Non-Supportive Verbal Questioning:

- Responding too quickly
- Changing the subject
- Talking too much about yourself
- Giving advice
- Preaching, placating, lecturing

- Over-interpreting
- Asking too many questions
- Interrupting silence
- Allowing the individual to ramble on about something that is totally irrelevant – keep everyone on track

Avoid Non-Supportive Body Language:

- Rigid severe posture
- Taking notes
- Clock watching
- Letting your gaze wander

Listen with compassion

The most important help you could offer is a willing ear. Allow the bereaved person to talk and express their grief in whichever way they need. This may include crying, fits of anger, screaming, laughing, expressions of guilt or regret, or engaging in activities that reduce their stress such as walking or gardening.

Suggestions include:

- Concentrate your efforts on listening carefully and with compassion
- Everyone’s experience of grief is unique, so let them grieve their own way
- Don’t judge or dispute their responses
- Criticising the way they express their grief is hurtful and will make them less likely to share their feelings with you
- If they don’t feel like talking, don’t press them.

Self-reflection - How did the discussion go? Make some notes

Arrive punctually at the arranged venue for the interview

This is usually the family home, however, occasionally you may be invited to meet with the family at the funeral home (particularly if the family have driven from a remote location). There may also be the occasion when the family prefer to come to your home office.

In any event make sure you are prepared before getting out of your car and remember to turn off your mobile phone – message bank will store any messages for you.

Use your observational skills. What does the garden look like? What can you see in the garage or under the carport – a caravan? boat? motor bike?

As you enter the house check out special photographs of past holiday locations, sports memorabilia – all these items are valuable clues which tell you something of the deceased's life and interests and can be a great catalyst for getting the family to talk.

Greet the family with an appropriate greeting, avoid platitudes and familiar words such "good morning, how are you today?" Develop a greeting that you are comfortable with along the lines of:

'My name is ... I am the celebrant. I spoke with you earlier today.'

Seating arrangements: it is much easier to take notes, maintain eye contact and engage with family members when seated around a dining table rather than a voluminous couch.

Question: Why do you think it might be important to be observant, taking a mental note of items you see as you walk to the house and photographs, sports memorabilia you may see inside the house? How will these help you during the interview? Have you found this technique helpful in the past? Discuss in small groups, share knowledge and experience.

Commence the interview

Allow the bereaved group time to settle and make sure you are comfortable too. If they offer tea or coffee, allow them to make it for you, they may want to find a way to prepare themselves for the conversation ahead and offering tea (rather than alcohol!) may help to put them into a comfort zone. If you don't drink tea or coffee, don't stop them making it for themselves – you could always ask for a glass of water.

Clarify your purpose – that you are there to listen to the family's memories of (*their father*) and that with their permission, you will be making notes (or typing) to record the stories they share. The information will be used to craft a personalised and meaningful ceremony to honour (celebrate / etc) ... Advise them that you will prepare a draft of the ceremony for their perusal.

Assure confidentiality and disclosure:

- Never get drawn into gossiping about other celebrants, the funeral director or staff, other members of the family.
- Never try to change the minds of the family regarding the arrangements they have made with the funeral director. If something concerns you, call the funeral director as soon as you return home from the interview.
- Never tell anecdotes disclosing names of previous clients.
- Never assume anything – take your instruction from the funeral director regarding the arrangements and the bereaved family regarding the wording of the ceremony.

At the end of the interview

- Make arrangements for delivery of the draft ceremony
- Recap the major points
- Thank them for spending the time with you and sharing memories of ...
- Make sure you leave a card with your contact details (not a wedding celebrant card)
- When you arrive home, telephone the Funeral Director to confirm you have met with the family
- Get started on the draft as soon as possible – while everything is still fresh in your mind
- Telephone the person/people who are writing the eulogy or tributes if you have not already met them and ask them to email you their wording as soon as possible
 - 'Why do you want this?' because you need to make sure the service will fit nicely into the time available; that you are not duplicating anything they have written; you want to give a presentation copy of the ceremony to the family and include the valuable contribution the participants have made.

Check the draft ceremony carefully

Once you have crafted the ceremony, make sure you ask at least one of the family members to carefully check the draft. Ask the family to pay special attention to the following when checking the draft:

- Spelling of names
- Dates and anniversaries
- The names of people to be acknowledged in the service

Next:

- Follow up on eulogies or tributes written by others so that you can include their words in the presentation copy. This also gives you the chance to check grammar, spelling, details, and length

- Read it aloud and time it – this is particularly important if you are conducting the service in one of the crematorium chapels – time restrictions!
- Once the draft is “signed off” – practice, practice, practice!

If required (in the majority of cases you will be expected to) send a copy of the ceremony to the funeral director.

Why? Because in the awful situation where the celebrant fails to arrive at the service, the funeral staff at least have the wording of the ceremony and will be able to conduct the service!

Here is a sample of a checklist you might take to the interview

Part one – the basic information you require – discuss with group members, what would you add or change?

Item	Details	Checked/to be checked
1. Check details: Name of deceased	Complete before the interview	
Commonly used name (pet name or nick name)		
Date and place of birth	Complete before the interview	
Date and place of death	Complete before the interview	
Funeral venue (1) Confirm details: Committal? Burial? Cremation?	Complete before the interview	
Funeral venue (2) If advised by FD	Complete before the interview	
Funeral Director / Arranger’s name & contact details	Complete before the interview	

Family member (NOK) contact details	Complete before the interview	
Appointment with family	Complete before the interview	
Acknowledged during the service: List names of nearest relatives (spouse/or Partner; children; siblings; parents, etc)	<i>Be sensitive about the order of people to be listed when asking this question</i>	All acknowledged? Yes/no
Who else to acknowledge including those not present		
Eulogy – who to write? Who will deliver?	<u>Ask for a copy of this - important</u>	
Contributions / verbal tributes etc. who & what?	<u>Ask for a copy of this - important</u>	
Contact details for readers/ people participating in the ceremony		

Any special arrangements (e.g. RSL, guard of honour, school children’s choir, etc)		
Is there to be a photographic tribute? Ideally 30 – 35 photos		

Questions to personalise the ceremony – for discussion during webinar, what would you add or change?

Here is a list of questions you might use when interviewing the bereaved family:

- Did the deceased have any favourite poems, readings, prayers, anecdotes, favourite expressions?
- Chronological sequence of events in the deceased’s life -
 - Where born, early childhood, parents, siblings
 - Education – schools attended
 - Further education
 - Public service
 - Professional life
- Details of marriage and family/extended family/significant friends?
- What are the deceased’s best remembered character/personality traits?
- Achievements/ambitions/long term dreams/disappointments in life ?
- Interests/hobbies/membership to clubs or organisations?
- Favourite authors/ movies / musicals?

- Was the deceased a good cook / gardener / artist / handy around the house?
- Favourite machines: motor bike/car/push-bike/boat?
- Travel / holidays / time spent in leisure?
- Place in history – always good to refer to some significant event that gives a sense of time?
- What ritual / symbol would most appropriately be used (normally during Reflection)?

Hint – never rely on the advice that XXXX will provide a robust and meaningful eulogy, truly reflecting the life of the deceased. That is not until you receive a copy of the eulogy and can judge for yourself! Prepare for the fact that you well may have to write the eulogy yourself, or at best, bolster the eulogy in the general order of the ceremony to reflect the life of the deceased.

In other words ask appropriate questions to find out the whole life story during the interview.

Advice to family and friends when writing the Eulogy

Some people seem to have the ability to choose the right words for all occasions, but most of us need a few prompts. It is essential to cover material that has direct relevance to the deceased. The writer may write about:

- Their relationship to the deceased;
- Special traits they remember - preferably with appropriate examples;
- Reminisce about the deceased's childhood, early career or aspects of their life of which many may be unaware;
- Stress the best qualities of the deceased rather than negatives
- Use anecdotes and favourite expressions
- Use humour wisely and respectfully

Before presenting it ask the writer to read through carefully several times and practice reading it aloud. The ideal length is anywhere between three and eight minutes.

Some helpful introductory sentences

- Let me offer some fond memories of Jane.....
- The first words Jim said to me were, " Can I give you a hand with that?".....
- It was impossible not to like Thomas.....
- Jane did a number of significant things for this community.....
- We will miss you Lewis.....
- I worked with Claire for 12 years, what a wonderful work companion

Timing

Timing is vitally important. Services held in the crematorium chapels must adhere strictly to time allotted. Families generally book a one-hour service; in this hour is the processional entry, the ceremony, getting mourners through to the condolence lounge and tea/coffee in the condolence lounge for family and mourners.

When conducting a funeral in a crematorium chapel, your ceremony should be timed to last no longer than 25-30 minutes (recommended). Families may book extra time for an additional fee. If the ceremony goes too long, families will not get their refreshments, even though they have paid for them.

Prepare the ceremony for the service

You should prepare at least two copies of the ceremony:

1. A presentation copy to hand to the family after the service;
2. The copy you will read from contained in a file or similar with stiff covers so the paper doesn't flap around – avoid plastic sleeves if you are reading with bright lights above you. Use a good size and easy to read font.
3. The funeral director may request a copy on the day if you haven't already emailed one, otherwise they may simply require a running sheet.

Guide to the General Outline of a Funeral Ceremony (extremely flexible of course)

Listed below is the general outline of the ceremony, this may vary according to the specific needs and instructions of the family, or instructions given by the funeral director – this is only a **suggested outline – not set in cement!** Discuss with group members, what would you add or change?

Note about announcements:

At some stage prior to the ceremony commencing an announcement must be made to request the mourners turn off mobile phones and other electronic communication devices. Usually the celebrant is expected to do this – try not to allow this announcement to interrupt the flow of the ceremony. You might want to get it out of the way before the ceremony commences. The other announcement the celebrant usually has to make is to advise the mourners about refreshments/wake/or gathering after the service. The opinion is generally divided as to whether it is best to do this at the beginning or towards the end of the ceremony.

1. Music on entering the chapel – start of the ceremony
2. The casket is brought in by funeral conductor, pallbearers, accompanied by celebrant – step forward at the door and say 'Please stand (if you are able)'
3. Begin the ceremony. Some celebrants briefly introduce themselves "... my name is on behalf of the family of '*deceased name*' I thank you for coming here today." Or words to that effect. *There is no need to tell the mourners you are a celebrant – avoid 'Good morning' and if you are known already by the mourners you may not need an intro.*
4. If the ceremony is to be followed by a committal at a different venue, advise the mourners appropriately: "Following the ceremony here today, the family will accompany '*deceased name*' to the XXX crematorium for a private cremation service." *Or words to that effect.*
5. The *Introduction* welcomes the mourners and informs them that they are gathered to 'celebrate', 'honour' or 'give thanks for' the life of ...*deceased's full name* ... acknowledges the presence of the family and acknowledges family and friends who are not able to attend.
6. A poem/reading/opening prayer.
7. The *Eulogy* – consists of the chronological history of the deceased's life – date and place of birth, parents, siblings, early childhood – through to recent years. The eulogy should reflect the character, achievements, interests, etc. and may contain a few appropriately amusing anecdotes that will be remembered by the mourners.
8. The *Tributes* – short verbal tributes by family and friends, letters or poems to be read aloud or placed in the casket (before or after the eulogy)
9. Photographic display (approximately 30-35 photos) shown on a screen to music
10. An appropriate piece of poetry/reading/prayer or final part of the deceased's life story.
11. The *Reflection* – music plays, the mourners are offered the opportunity to silently pray (providing the family have agreed to this) or simply reflect on the meaning the deceased's life had for them. During this time rituals may be involved – the family may come up and light candles – or family and mourners bring forward flowers, rosemary, lavender, shells, etc. to place on the casket. *Very important:* when introducing the reflection, request that everyone please reserve their condolences to the family until after the ceremony. They will have

the opportunity to offer condolences in the condolence lounge (or wherever) after the service.

12. Reading/poem/prayer (Psalm 23 is very popular here)
13. The *Final Words of Parting* – the ceremony is now drawing to a conclusion; final words of parting sum up the feelings that have been shared by the mourners and life that has been lived.
14. The *Committal* – ask the mourners to stand for the committal. The words of the committal should be deeply significant and reverent.
15. *Words of Comfort* – spoken to offer comfort to the mourners, another poem also offering hope and comfort, and finally the thanks from the family to everyone who attended and people or organisations they have asked the celebrant to thank on their behalf.
16. Music to exit – allow the mourners to sit for a while, the music was chosen by the family for its significance and may be very comforting so don't get them up the minute it starts to play – wait for at least a minute or two.
17. Signal to the funeral directors that you are ready to close the service – you may step towards the family; the conductor will come to take them through to the condolence lounge (or similar). You may assist in ushering the remaining mourners follow.

Who will prepare and deliver the eulogy?

The eulogy may be prepared by either a member of the family, close family friend, or work colleague. The eulogy may also be prepared by the celebrant or minister, who will draft a eulogy following the interview with the bereaved family members. The eulogy may be delivered by either a member of the family, close family friend, work colleague, the celebrant or minister or indeed, a combination of these people, in other words, several people, addressing various stages of the life of the deceased may participate in the eulogy delivery. Most importantly the spoken eulogy must truly reflect and honour the life of the deceased; so that the mourners listening to the eulogy recognise and reflect on the valuable memories of times and experiences shared during that person's life.

Why offer special readings, poems and prayers?

Grief is often so difficult to articulate; through the introduction of favourite readings, poems and prayers in the ceremony, we are able to express emotions and thoughts to inspire and give comfort to the bereaved family and friends.

Why encourage rituals and symbolism for inclusion in the ceremony?

The involvement of ritual, symbol in a ceremony adds another dimension altogether to the overall effect of the ceremony and can prove quite powerful when included in a dignified and meaningful manner.

Symbols convey an idea or emotion sometimes more effectively than words; you have heard the expression 'a picture tells a thousand words'. Symbols have been utilised since ancient times to emphasise many emotions; however, we can create these same powerful emotions by the symbolism of simple things – water, petals, seashells, candles and so on. Sporting trophies, fisher's hat and rod, musical instruments – the possibilities are limitless.

Rituals and symbols must be relative and appropriate to reflect some aspect of the deceased's life and satisfy the bereaved family's needs.

Exercise: Spend a few minutes to think about the rituals or symbolism you believe would be most appropriate for the following situations – discuss with group members..

- An elderly man who had been a great gardener
- A middle-aged woman who was well known for her skill in crafting beautiful baskets
- A teenage boy who had been captain of the school cricket team
- A still-born infant
- A middle-aged man who had been a great adventurer and sailed single-handed around the world
- A dear old grandma always remembered for her home-made pickles and jams

Consider Rituals and Symbols for inclusion in the service

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- A bowl filled with oil of rosemary, sandalwood, and lavender – mixed with vegetable oil. Rosemary for remembrance, sandalwood for spiritual vibrations, lavender promotes peace. Mourners step forward and dip their finger into the bowl of oils, rub a small candle with the oil, then light it. “As you light your candle, think of it as inviting ...(dec)..., whose spirit is now joined with the Light, to illuminate these proceedings with her presence.
- Gifts of Nature – decorate the table with flowers, plants, trees and herbs to remind of the connection to the earth. Peppermint is known to have healing and purification properties, when sprayed in the chapel it will increase the vibration of the room and start the healing process.
- Visualisation – ask the mourners to visualise a beautiful scene or an element of nature and imagine themselves in it fully. “Fill your being with this image, making it the purest and highest thought you ever had about yourself, and then offer it to ...(dec)... so that she may take the beauty of this earth and of your spirit with her wherever she goes.” Ring a bell at the start and end of the ritual.
- A beautiful scarf – the favourite colours of the deceased – the mourners each write on it the words which are their hopes and gifts for the next part of the journey. They take the scarf and drape it over the coffin or if open, gently around the deceased.
- Threads of love – similar to above – favourite colours are chosen again – the mourners write a blessing of love on their lengths of ribbon. Prior to the ceremony, the ribbons are sewn together. The different colours and messages signify that each thread of love is unique. The ribbon is brought forward during the reflection.
- The bowl of tears – a large bowl is placed on a central table on top of cloth flowing from the table with loose flowers scattered around the bowl. One at a time, the mourners come forward carrying a small bottle of water, they speak a short blessing, sharing their memories, then pour their water into the bowl representing the tears and grief they share.

EXERCISE: Research poetry sites and find suitable examples of poetry. Be aware of Copyright issues. Commence a collection of poetry for future use. Suggestion: categorise your poetry collection as follows:

Poems/readings suitable for ...

- Grandparent(s)
- Mother
- Father
- Children
- Gardeners
- Fisher people
- Sports people

- Great cooks

Recommended Reading to Inspire

Remembering Well – Sarah York ISBN 0 7879 55078
Great Occasions (readings/poetry) – Carl Seaburg ISBN 0933840 098
In Memoriam – Edward Searl ISBN 155896 407X
Beyond Absence – Edward Searl ISBN 1-55896-492-4
Rituals for Love, Life and Loss – Dorothy McRae-McMahon
Seasons of Life (readings/poetry) – Nigel Collins ISBN 03010000018
Creating Meaningful Funeral Ceremonies – Alan Wolfelt
The Book of Eulogies – Ed Phyllis Theroux
Ceremonies & Celebrations – Dally R Messenger
The Journey Through Grief: Reflections on Healing by Alan D. Wolfelt,
On Death & Dying – Elisabeth Kubler Ross