

Funerals postponed

The Covid19 pandemic is affecting our lives and our deaths. Families are having to make choices about funerals they haven't faced before. Everyday more state and federal officials suggest (or mandate) that we refrain from gathering in groups of more than 10 (though this advice has probably changed even as you read this).

This is going to be difficult, but it is not impossible, and it is important to keep a sense of perspective, especially when the emotions of a death in the family take hold. Many American families have stopped arranging large-group funerals for years simply because they're too costly for a growing number of households.

This doesn't mean we can't grieve. It doesn't mean we can't honor the memory of someone we loved. It doesn't mean that we can't connect and commune with our families and friends. Yes, it does mean we aren't going to have the solace of that in-person hug, and the meal afterward, and that's the hardest part.

But here are some things we can do. Some of these are activities that have already become common or even traditional in some areas:

- Remember that the physical disposition of the body doesn't control how we grieve and mend our wounds. Choosing simple services without in-person gatherings and ceremonies, such as [direct cremation](#) and [immediate burial](#), will get the body where it needs to go.
- But what then? We can't have the in-person memorial services many of us are used to. But there are many free online services that let us see and hear each other in real time over video. Zoom, Facetime, or whatever application you ordinarily use can be put to use in the same virtual room with the people who would ordinarily show up to hug you at the funeral.

Sarah Jane Lambring of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of North Texas and the National Home Funeral Alliance, has some help for us. [Watch her video on how to conduct a virtual memorial service here.](#)

- Adapt a practice familiar to New England families, who often do “spring burial.” The frozen ground is too hard to dig in winter; most of our cemeteries hold the caskets in hillside crypts until spring. It’s common for families to gather in spring for a graveside service even though death occurred months earlier.

No, we’re not suggesting you pay a funeral home or cemetery a huge fee to store the casket for a later burial. But what about scheduling a memorial service for three months in the future? Funeral homes would certainly be glad to have that business, or you can do so through your church, at your fraternal or social organization, or in a family home.

- Now might be a good time to make some hands-on, family-created memories of the person who died. Children and adults can write an “obituary”, or a reflection on what grandpa meant to them. Victorians used to make lacework pieces out of a lock of hair. Do you have photos that can go into a collage? Do you knit or crochet, or work wood? Make something that honors grandma. It’s therapy right in the here and now, and it will become a family heirloom with meaning that can’t be bought. These family pieces can be gathered together for that later memorial service, too.