



A blog: The hidden impact of a direct funeral service

Over the last couple of years I've had a few clients come through for counselling, struggling after their loved one had requested a direct funeral. In some cases they didn't know their loved one had requested no service, in other cases they knew what was planned but could not go against their loved one's wishes, even though it made them uncomfortable. The purpose of my writing this isn't to say that direct funerals are wrong or should be stopped, for some families they are absolutely the right decision, what I would like to highlight is the importance of discussing the decision with loved ones beforehand and being aware of the various complications it *can* cause to their grieving process, allowing everyone to make a more informed decision. Below I have listed some of the elements my clients have found difficult, as food for thought for others. Of course, I have omitted any details that could potentially compromise the confidentiality of my clients, and to further protect this I have generalised points and also requested to remain anonymous.

So, in my experience, clients have felt that the direct funeral lost them:

- The opportunity to have their grief publicly acknowledged – Funerals are a chance for friends and family to offer their condolences and acknowledge the family's loss, helping to validate their feelings.
- The chance to share and hear memories that they might not have heard before – Funerals bring together individuals from all different areas of the person's life, offering the family a chance to hear different stories and anecdotes about their loved one and hear how fond others were of them.
- The opportunity to hear about that parts of the person's life that they weren't involved with – How often do people come out of a funeral saying, "I didn't know (insert fact here) about such and such?", even for someone they'd known well for years? Funerals are a chance to learn more about a person's life that wouldn't necessarily have come up in normal conversation with them.

- The chance to see that others also cared for their loved one – It's helpful to see that the individual was admired by more than just the immediate family. It can be reassuring to see a crowd turn up to mark their passing, showing that they were loved outside of just the family and that their loss has been felt.
- The safety of ritual and knowing 'where to start' with their grief – It's so common to hear families in the first few days and weeks after a loss saying that they don't know how they're supposed to feel or behave. The funeral and all the traditions that come with it provide a structure to the family's mourning, telling them what to do and how to behave during that time and providing some safety when everything is up in the air.
- A goal to get them through in the very early days of grief – When people are first bereaved, the future is terrifying. Looking towards the rest of your life and seeing that loved one missing tends to feel so overwhelming it can seem hard to even get through the day. On the other hand, not looking to the future at all can make it feel like you'll be trapped in this strange limbo forever. Looking to the funeral date can give people a goal to work towards that doesn't feel too drastic, but is far enough away to keep them motivated and moving.

These are a few of the most general challenges that direct funerals created for the grieving families I have supported in recent years. If you are planning your own, or know someone that is, I urge you to talk to those closest to you, and have them consider these elements to check that you are all making an informed decision that won't negatively impact those that matter most, later down the line.