

What to expect and tips for attending a funeral for a person from the Hmong culture

The following are traditions typically found at a funeral for a person from the Hmong culture. Each family may choose to approach the funeral for their loved ones in a different way. Here are some general ideas of what to expect and etiquette:

- Traditionally in Hmong culture funerals last for 3 days for children (Saturday start) and 4 days for adults (Friday start).
- These days are to help the deceased safely cross over into the spirit world.
- Visitors can come any time, day or night, during these 3/4 days, but traditionally the 2-3rd days tend to be attended more by immediate family. Burial is usually on Monday around 10 am.

What to expect, if you go:

- People will be visiting, laughing, cooking, serving, working, playing cards or doing something to pass the time.
- It is appropriate to stay as long as you would like.
- There is usually a table set up to accept money (referred to as “Sunshine money” to help the family pay the funeral costs). No one is required to give. If you choose to, go up to the table and give money to the person at the table. They will ask for your name so the family knows who gave and how much. Someone may come beside you and start bowing and speaking in Hmong. They are thanking you for your generosity and kindness to help the family during their time of grief.
- There will be speakers making announcements throughout the funeral.
- The room with the deceased will have close family members sitting near them to protect their spirit.
- Anyone can go and see the deceased and pay respects to the family.
- In this room there will be drumming and a bamboo instrument (qeej) “sings” music to help the spirit of the deceased with their journey to the spirit world. It is actually musical words since our language is tonal.
- Food and drinks are served 24/7 in the dining area for everyone. The family appreciates you staying and eating/drinking something if you can.
- The following are typical events of the 3-4 days of the funeral of a Hmong child:
 - **The first day** has music playing to prepare the spirit for the journey. This is an appropriate day to come to pay your respects.
 - **The second day** is when family and friends pay their respects and give their offerings. Family members will arrive carrying bags or baskets and a branch or stick with joss paper attached. These are offerings for the deceased before the final send off.
 - **The third day** the music continues before the send off of the deceased. There tend to be fewer people in attendance on this day. This is the final time for family to say goodbye. Everyone pitches in to clean up from the 3 days.. At about 10 am the family goes to the burial site and no one will be back to the funeral home. Remaining family members will return to the deceased home after burial to help keep the home “warm” after the funeral.
- In summary:
 - The first 2 days of the Hmong funeral are the best to visit, but *any day is fine*.
 - At the LaCrosse Hmong Cultural and Community Center, enter the room ahead to the left. Have a seat, or go to the deceased and the family will be seated around.
 - You may pay your respects and then go and get something to eat or drink. Sit and talk with family/friends in the dining area.
 - Someone will usually approach you to help you know where to go and what to do.

What to Expect and Tips for Attending a Wake or Funeral

Ask yourself “Should I go to this wake or funeral?” Consider your motivation as you decide to attend. If you were friends with the deceased and/or feel you can provide comfort to the family, it would be appropriate to attend.

Dress respectfully. A wake is not the place to make a fashion statement – find something to wear that will not call attention to you. Conservative dress shows respect to the family.

Acknowledge the bereaved. The point of going to a wake or funeral is to offer the family your sincere condolences for their loss. Think about what you want to say to the family before you go. Appropriate comments would include: who you are, how you knew the deceased, you are very sorry for their loss, and a good memory/thought about the person who has passed away. Remember that for the most part the family is in a numb state, so they may not respond the way you expect.

Consider the crowd. No matter how close you may be to the family, you must show respect for the situation and after a few words move on and give your place to others in line. You will have the opportunity in the future to stop by, call, or send a letter to offer support and sympathy.

The casket may be there. Depending on the faith and traditions of the family, be prepared for an open casket, group or individual prayer, a service, burial ceremony, or other customs you may not be familiar with. Think beforehand about how you want to participate.

Visit others present. After you have had the chance to speak with the family, it is appropriate to talk *quietly* with others in attendance. Remember to keep your conversations appropriate. Consider sharing your feelings and memories of the deceased with your friends or supportive adults.

Sign in. There will likely be a guest book for you to sign. This gives the family a way to remember all the visitors who came to show their respect.

Flowers & cards. The fact that you have come in person to express your sympathy is what’s most important. You can also choose to bring a card or send flowers to the wake/funeral. Children are not expected to give money, but may decide to purchase flowers as a group (i.e. from a club, team, friend group).

Share emotions appropriately. It’s okay to express your emotions at a wake or funeral, but be sensitive to people closest to the deceased. If you become extremely emotional try to remove yourself from where the family is, to not upset them further.

Remember what is happening. This is an opportunity for you to say goodbye to your friend or loved one and support the family and those closest to the deceased.

Helping Yourself and Others Cope with Grief

When someone dies you can experience many different thoughts and feelings, sometimes all at once. The following are some ideas to help with the grieving process.

- Common emotions may include sadness, withdrawal, avoidance, disbelief, anger, and sometimes even joking and laughter. Allow yourself **and** others to experience grief in different ways
- Try to share your thoughts and feelings with friends and relatives. Although this is oftentimes painful, talking about the deceased and the circumstances surrounding a death helps us heal
- Be sure to take care of your physical self (get enough sleep, eat right, exercise, don't use drugs or alcohol to numb the pain or lift your mood artificially)
- Don't be afraid to cry
- Give and accept hugs
- Let others know what they can do to help you
- Think about the good times. Get out old picture albums to help you remember him/her
- Write a poem or song about the one who died
- Create a sympathy card for the family/friends of the deceased
- Create an individual or large group piece of artwork to give to the family
- Write a letter to the one who died telling him/her all the things you would have liked to say to him/her
- Write about your loss in a journal
- Create a scrap book or photo album celebrating the person's life
- Get involved in a cause or organization that was important to him/her
- Plan ahead for grief "triggers" (anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, and other milestones) which can reawaken memories and feelings. Talk with family before the date and agree on strategies to honor the person you loved

Common Grief Reactions of Children/Adolescents

(not all age groups will respond the same)

Although each of us experiences loss in a different manner, some behavioral or emotional reactions are typical for bereaved children. Most often a child's grief will be manifested through his/her body and behavior. The following list identifies some common grief reactions often seen in bereaved children.

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Loss of appetite
Increased appetite
Difficulty falling asleep
Difficulty staying asleep
Nightmares
Bedwetting
Reappearance of toileting accidents
Stomach aches (especially before or during school)
Headaches
Fatigue

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

Irritability
Mood swings
Marked changes in behavior (for the better or worse)
Panic (a sense of being overwhelmed by fear of danger to self or others)
Hyperactivity
Disinterest in normal activities

MENTAL REACTIONS

Shorter attention span
Difficulty concentrating
Memory difficulties
Distractible
Preoccupation with the dead person

SOCIAL REACTIONS

Withdrawal from family and friends
Developmental regression (thumb sucking, baby talk, and immature behavior)
Separation anxiety (fear of being separated from parent)
Aggression towards others