



Dealing with Family Dynamics after Loss



SYTSEMA
FUNERAL & CREMATION SERVICES

Table of Contents

03

Introduction

04

PART I: Why does a death
change family dynamics?

07

PART II: Tips to keep your
family together during times
of grief

11

Conclusion



SYTSEMA
FUNERAL & CREMATION SERVICES

sytsemafh.com

Introduction

It's common for the loss of a family member or loved one to disrupt the balance within a family. Disagreements are often inevitable at this time when emotions run high, everyone is exhausted, and difficult decisions are needed to be made. Adding to this volatile situation is the fact that everyone grieves differently and may be at varying stages of emotions, thus have feelings that conflict with others. The important thing to remember is that just about every family experiences some shift in dynamics surrounding the death of a family member or loved one — you are not alone! We created this eBook in hopes that by knowing what to expect, you are able to prepare for and have the tools to deal with the potential of family issues that may arise during this difficult time.



Inside this eBook you'll learn why and how death affects family dynamics and what you can do to help your family grieve together rather than be torn apart.

PART I: Why does a death change family dynamics?

There are many reasons why families struggle with changing dynamics after the death of a loved one. When a close relative dies, it not only causes grief for individual family members, but it also affects how your family functions. Suddenly roles change, people may behave out of character, opinions become strong and rifts can rise up in the heat of emotions that may come out in ways not intended. Here is a look at several sources of family strife. Having an understanding of why things change can help you to spot signs of trouble before it arrives, and a little understanding can go a long way.

Unresolved Issues

It is not uncommon for past grievances between family members to resurface following a death in the family. There may be underlying resentment between siblings who feel one took on more than their share of responsibility in the care of the deceased and that another should have been available to help more often. It could even go way back to a childhood spat. Don't be surprised if these types of issues rise to the surface when emotions become elevated.

PART I: Why does a death change family dynamics?

Different Ways of Coping

Everyone grieves differently and it's quite possible that although you are grieving the same loss, you are all coping with it in different ways and are in different stages of your grief. This results in situations such as one person wanting to talk about it while another wants to avoid the subject. One person may be ready to go through a loved one's belongings, while someone else needs more time. These differences often result in misunderstandings and arguments.

Age, Relationship, and Role

The way in which people respond to the death of a loved one can also depend upon things like their relationship with the deceased, their age, and the role they have in the family. Clearly a wife or son of a loved one will respond differently than a cousin or close friend. In addition, someone elderly may have many more shared experiences than someone younger. The oldest of siblings may feel a responsibility to take the reins, and so on. These differing, existing dynamics all have an impact on the way people grieve and can lead to angst among family members who don't take these differences into consideration.

PART I: Why does a death change family dynamics?

Heightened Stress and Emotions

Understandably, the days leading up to and following a death of a loved one are filled with complicated emotions and elevated levels of stress. People in this state tend to behave differently than normal and may even have trouble thinking rationally. Others may be struggling with “survivor’s guilt,” unable to get over “if only” thoughts. When emotions run high and stress levels rise it can easily lead to problems.

Too Close for Comfort

Immediately after a death is usually a time when family members come together which is often supportive and comforting, but can also be difficult. It is not unusual for families, especially those who don’t usually spend a lot of time together, to find the experience of sudden togetherness stressful. This can feed an already anxious situation and result in disagreements and arguments, especially when making decisions concerning the funeral or personal belongings.



PART II: Tips to keep your family together during times of grief

Considering the different sources that feed into family dynamics following a death, it is easy to see why there are often misunderstandings as each member of the family adjusts to changes, deals with emotions, and grieves in his or her own way. We have found that these issues are almost always inevitable, but they don't have to tear your family apart. Here are some tips to help get you and your family through this difficult time together:

Respect each other's differences

It helps if family members who are at odds can take a step back and try to see the value in each other's choices or opinions. Maybe you can compromise, or maybe you will have to agree to disagree, either way, having a good understanding of where each is coming from can help to diffuse the situation and solve the problem.

Focus on what's important

Even if you can't get on the same page, try to focus on what's the most important thing at hand, which is what your loved one would want. It's important to keep the big picture in mind to ensure you do not have any regrets, but instead happy memories.

PART II: Tips to keep your family together during times of grief

Find ways to restore control

There are some, who in their grief, seek any way they can to regain a sense of control. They may try to take over decisions, plan the funeral service without anyone's input, or immediately sort through belongings. This can obviously be upsetting to other family members, but understanding this need for control and finding other ways to restore it is key to avoiding this type of situation. Helping this family member channel energy into things that are helpful can nip this problem in the bud.

Communicate kindly

While it can be difficult not to lash out when you are hurt or angry, you can keep conflicts from escalating by refraining from using "you" statements and using "I" statements instead. "I was very hurt when you chose flowers without me" is far less provoking than, "you shouldn't have chosen flowers without my input." "You" statements put people immediately on the defensive, while "I" statements make them aware of how their actions are affecting others and can help to stop offending behavior rather than start an argument over it. Keep in mind, you may be behaving in ways that are upsetting to others as well. Having kind conversations can help everyone stay calm and considerate to others.

PART II: Tips to keep your family together during times of grief

Find it in your heart to forgive

Grief can make people behave in uncharacteristic ways and sometimes do things they regret later. It is important to keep this in mind, and cut family members a little slack. Give them the benefit of the doubt that this poor behavior was due to the difficult time you were all going through, and shouldn't override years of decent behavior and happy memories you've shared throughout your



relationship. All too often, family members dwell on the conflicting issues that come up when dealing with a death and allow them to have a long-term effect on their family. There is only one time to say goodbye to your loved one. You want to savor this time together, not regret it.

PART II: Tips to keep your family together during times of grief

Make a plan!

This is another big reason why it's so important to preplan a funeral. Knowing wishes ahead of time and having decisions already made means there are no questions to answer, issues to resolve, or different viewpoints to deal with, which all but eliminates arguing. Conflicts typically arise around making decisions. When they're made ahead of time, it eases tension, lessens stress, and allows family members to concentrate on grieving together rather than worrying about what to do. Even if your loved one did not preplan, you can still make your own plan to all sit down together, go over details, discuss next steps, and ensure everyone is heard, understood and on the same page to avoid any future problems.

Talk with someone who can help

It can be very beneficial to talk with someone outside the family if your family is having particular difficulties. Our caring staff is always available and experienced in dealing with family dynamics and helping families find peace together.

Conclusion

The death of a loved one is an intensely emotional time in life, and can understandably disrupt family dynamics and change how families function, but with patience, understanding, and a willingness to communicate openly, your family will get through this difficult time, and we will be here for you every step of the way.

If you need assistance with end-of-life decisions and planning, or your family would like some help and support, contact Sytsema Funeral & Cremation Services in Muskegon at 231-726-5210 or in Grand Haven at 616-842-6100. We are always happy to help.