



# Memorial Planning Guide

Create a lasting vision of love  
for your loved one





## Creating a Lasting Vision of Love

Dear Families,

Memorialization is so much more than manufacturing a monument with someone's name on it. Memorialization begins in the hearts and minds of family and close friends, drawing from memories and experiences with their departed loved one. It includes grieving – not only allowing ourselves to experience the pain of our loss but also trudge through the time it takes to adjust to a “new normal” without that person.

Memorialization is also about personal and family legacy – ensuring that your departed loved one is honored for the life they lived and that generations to come can draw inspiration from their life. Memorialization, when we embrace the process, is central to our ability to heal from our loss...and to celebrate and preserve our family history.

This brings me to the purpose of this Memorial Planning Guide. We've created this guide from years of working with thousands of families. We've learned from them as well as from clergy, healthcare, and funeral home professionals.

I invite you to use this guide as a starting point in your memorialization process. While we may not know your personal story yet, we know what you're going through – not only from our own experiences but from supporting the many families we've had the privilege to serve throughout the years.

Supporting families like yours is our personal and professional mission – to help you create a lasting vision of love for your beloved. If we can be of any further help, please call us at a Dodds Memorials branch near you.



Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neil Fogarty".

Neil Fogarty, President

A photograph of two hands cupping a lit candle. The candle is in a glass holder and has a bright flame. The background is dark, making the light from the candle stand out.

*I think we dream so we don't  
have to be apart so long. If  
we're in each other's dreams  
we can be together all the time.*

*– A.A. Milne (Winnie the  
Pooh)*



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*Matthew Morrison is a former pastor and memorial consultant with Dodds Memorials.*

## 3 Ways to be Present for Grief

By Matthew Morrison

There's no formula for grieving. We are each affected differently because we bring our own unique personality, experiences, and beliefs with us. These differences can be a reason why we struggle to know how to be helpful when our friend or loved one is grieving – or when someone is trying to be helpful to us.

This is also why the most important consideration when supporting someone is to simply be present with them. This means that our focus is on remaining comfortable with silence as we listen and sit still. This is often hard to do – we believe being helpful includes directing or advising. We feel like we should be “doing” something. Yet, it's often more helpful to offer an empathetic ear and our calm presence.

The suggestions to the right are just a starting point. It's hard for us to know exactly how to prepare for death and how to help people cope with it. The most underestimated gift we have to offer people is our time and presence. By practicing these skills today, you will be prepared for when you're needed the most.



### **Acknowledge the perspective and feelings of others.**

Our greatest hurdle to helping is our own perspective. We must be able to acknowledge our limitations of fully understanding someone else's pain. We can recognize that they are having their own experience, feelings, and perspective on what has happened. This requires us to see their hurt, acknowledge its powerful reality, and offer a safe space for them to process their pain with us.

### **Understand their grief without passing judgment.**

We also struggle to support someone when they make decisions we don't understand or agree with about what is best for themselves and their family. These decisions cover a range of issues from how they handle memorial services to when and how they choose to socialize. We might think they are moving on too quickly or not soon enough. When people do things we don't understand, it often leads to conversations of condemnation and condescension. It is our responsibility to listen, learn, and support them as they go through their process of grief without judging them.

### **Commit to them long-term as they find a “new” normal.**

After crisis moments, life may never fully return to normal – or “the way things were.” We need to allow people the time to establish their new normal. We can often create more stress for our loved one by sugarcoating the present or by pushing for a return to life as it was before their loss. Our responsibility is to be constant in our love and care through the transition to this new normal. Perhaps we can begin by offering to take care of practical, everyday things – cooking them dinner, doing their laundry, or mowing the lawn. Once they return to doing these tasks, we can turn our attention to longer term support – checking in on a consistent basis and engaging in face to face time with that person. We can remember to be there for them as holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays come – their first experiences without their loved one.



## Writing Loves a Writer...

Many of the families we've worked with have chosen to write a letter to their loved one. This can be especially helpful for children when they've lost a close family member. Either for yourself or another member of your family, we recommend this as a way to experience the range of thoughts and feelings you may be experiencing through this loss.

Please remember there is no wrong way to do it. This is an opportunity to express yourself in a direct way.

It may also be meaningful for your family to do something special with the letters. Some ideas include:

- 1) Placing them in your loved one's casket if they are to be buried.
- 2) Gather the family for a remembrance dinner.
  - a. Have each family member read their letter out loud.
  - b. Collect your letters in a jar that you've decorated in honor of your loved one. Keep the jar on your mantel and re-read these letters from time to time when you miss your loved one or need inspiration.
  - c. Hold a ceremony outside and place them in a small fire. Throughout history, across many cultures, fire has been a symbol for the transition from life to death. This can be a way for your family to send their love and prayers to your loved one.

Of course, there are as many ideas for how to best honor your loved one as there are families. Choose what will work best for you.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

When I think about saying goodbye to you, I feel...

Some of my favorite memories of spending time with you are...

I'm so grateful that you taught me...

Something I want you to know is...

I will always remember...

Love, \_\_\_\_\_

*Writing--and this is the big secret--wants to be written.*

*Writing loves a writer the way God loves a true devotee.*

*Writing will fill your heart if you let it.*

- Julia Cameron





## Remembrance for Today...and for Generations.

As you begin the process of planning the memorial service, think about what you and your loved one would like – the words, music, and other considerations to make your loved one’s service memorable and in honor of who they are and what they’ve meant to those around them.

The following questions serve as a meaningful start for what you’d like to include at the memorial service as well as other considerations, such as designing your loved one’s monument or other memorial.

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How should they be remembered? Were they known for their volunteerism or community activism? Did they serve in the Armed Services? Are there hobbies that define who they are? Did they have a distinguished career? What do you want them to be known for?

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Was there a defining moment in their life that should be recognized?

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Is there a favorite charity or cause that you want people to donate to in their honor?

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Who had the biggest influence in their life? Is there a way you’d like to honor that person?

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Do they have a favorite author or musician? If so, are there special quotes, passages, or lyrics you think should be included in the service?

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Who should speak at the memorial service? Are there dear friends or particular family members who your loved one would want to speak in their honor?

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Are there particular religious or spiritual passages that would best honor your loved one?



*Remembrance is the only  
paradise out of which we  
cannot be driven away.*

— Richter



## Storytelling

Family and friends gathering to tell stories is one of the most important and powerful ways we can grieve and heal from loss. Storytelling can be formal, such as selecting key people from your loved one's life to tell a story at their memorial service or it can be ongoing, informal stories as life moves forward.

Take the time to identify your loved one's favorite stories and the stories about them that mean the most or illustrate who they are.

### Stories and books they loved

Is there a favorite book or story they read to their children? That they liked to hear during holidays? List them here.

### Stories about your loved one

List some of your favorite stories about your loved one – you may choose to write out the full story or, for this planning guide, simply write down a few words to remind you of the story.

...And who should tell them? Are their particular friends or family members who experienced these stories?

### Excerpt from *The Velveteen Rabbit*

by Margery Williams

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but Really loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get all loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."





## Raindrops on Roses and Whiskers on Kittens

Many of us are familiar with Julie Andrews' most famous role as Maria from *The Sound of Music*. During a particularly bad thunderstorm, she sings to the children to calm their fear. Her universal message is that when we think about our favorite things, we won't feel as bad as we did. Use this space to record some favorite things.

For memorial planning – and to help our family through their grieving process – it may also be helpful to think about and gather our favorite things around us.

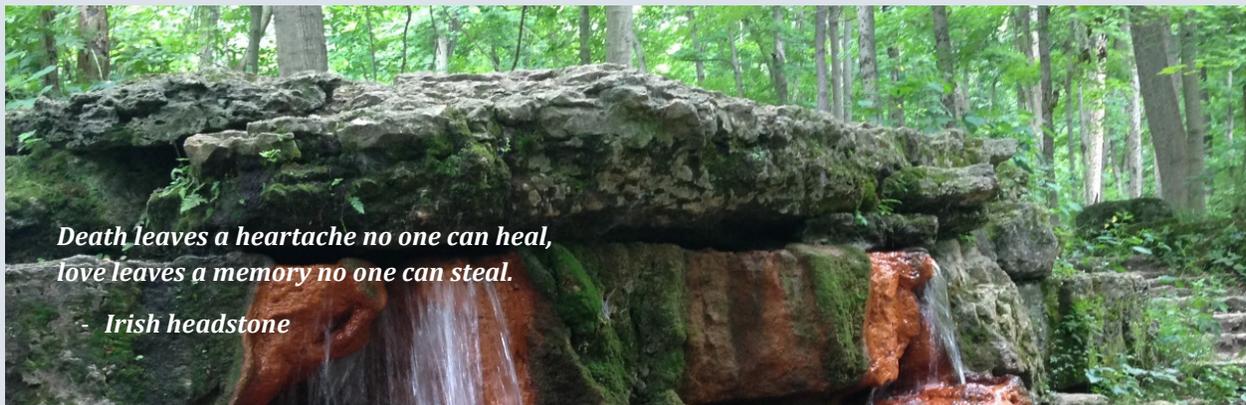
### Places and activities

For both your loved one and members of your family, list the places and activities that were favorite things to do. From walks in the park to favorite restaurants to playing music – or social or sporting events – making plans with your family to enjoy some of these things can engender meaningful family time for storytelling or just being together in support of each other.

### Belongings and keepsakes

It can be healing to offer one of your loved one's favorite things to family members and close friends. It can be a way for them to process their grief while feeling connected to them.

Is there a favorite shirt or other item of your loved one's that a family member would wear to help their grieving process? Are there important items that can be made into a shadowbox? For instance, if your loved one was a cook, you can use their favorite wooden spoon, a recipe page, and their oven mitt and frame in a shadow box. Hang it in your home, or the home of a family member who would benefit from such a gift.





## Life Celebrations

You've now written letters. You've identified how you want your loved one to be honored and the stories that are important to tell. Now, we want to dedicate a page to planning what you want your loved one's life celebration to include.

When we talk about creating a lasting vision of love, we think of that vision as all inclusive – from how we grieve to how we gather together in their honor, to how we choose to memorialize our loved one for this and future generations.

### Gathering

Do you want a large group of family and friends or a more intimate setting? Formal or informal? When should the celebration happen – right away or later on? These are just a few questions you may want to consider in your planning. Use this space to write down your ideas and preferences.

### Food, Music, and Activities

What sort of food would you like to serve? Family recipes? A particular cuisine your loved one enjoyed? Catered or potluck? Live music or CDs of your loved one's favorite musicians? Any special songs or hymns? Here, you can write down your ideas for what would work best to create the right celebration for your loved one.

### Location

Indoors or outdoors? At your home or a rented space? Should it be decorated with a formal tone or more relaxed? Is there a theme that best expresses your loved one's life and legacy? Write down your ideas and wishes for where to hold the memorial celebration.



Be sure to follow us on Pinterest for celebration ideas and more.



## Designing Your Loved One's Memorial

Please use these two pages to sketch ideas for what you envision for your loved one's memorial. Use a pencil and consider the shape of the monument. Think about what you'd like written on it and any images you'd like added – such as a religious symbol, a military designation, a favorite pastime or other image that represents who they are and how they lived. You may choose to design a monument with a custom shape.

Sketching your ideas is a great way to generate ideas and will help you work with a memorial designer when the time comes. Be sure to bring this Memorial Planning Guide with you when you visit your local Dodds Consultant.



# Designing Your Loved One's Memorial

Dodds Memorials  
Online at



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