

Study Finds the Lack of Flowers at Funerals May Hinder Grieving Process

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Recent research indicates that sympathy flowers may not only brighten and warm a funeral or memorial service setting, but also have a positive impact on the emotional well being of the bereaved. The phrase "In Lieu of Flowers" is now considered a major barrier to the healing process. Clay Atchison has archived this study, and related information, on the Web site, inlieuofflowers.info, to support people in making the right decision regarding funeral flowers.

Victoria, Texas (PRWEB) December 30, 2009 -- The giving and receiving of flowers during times of mourning, is a long-standing funeral tradition. Now picture a funeral without flowers.

"Beyond simply color and ambience, flowers play a significant role in the grieving process," shares Clay Atchison, of www.inlieuofflowers.info. But, despite the results of the 2006 study which tells us that flowers make the process more manageable and inject some degree of pleasure, the presence of flowers at and around funerals is actually diminishing.

The behavioral research study conducted by Nancy Etcoff, Ph.D., of Harvard University, underscores the importance of flowers in our lives and reveals some of the calming, fortifying feelings they can create. The Role of Flowers and Plants in the Bereavement Process, funded jointly by the American Floral Endowment and the Society of American Florists Information Committee, more than half of the bereaved surveyed strongly agreed that flowers were a critical component of the funeral ritual that helped them deal with their grief.

This study reveals that flowers feed compassion and chase away anxiety and worries. The research participants lived with fresh flowers for just a few days and reported increases in feelings of compassion and kindness for others. Overall, people simply felt less negative after being around flowers.

"What we learned is that flowers can have profound positive effects on our emotions," said Etcoff. "We have an innate attraction to flowers," she added, "and through research we are beginning to discover why that is so."

The bereavement process is a pivotal time when worry, anxiety, and many sad emotions are present. With such compelling research that shows the presence of flowers make a positive impact on people's emotional well-being, florists want the funeral industry to know flowers are a critical part of the bereavement process.

According to funeral directors, more and more families are requesting that donations to charitable organizations be made in honor of their departed loved ones. When families request these donations, the request is often through the obituary or announcement and reads something along the lines of "In lieu of flowers, donations can be sent to..."

While a donation is certainly an appropriate tribute that immortalizes the deceased in both name and philanthropy, this trend has some florists worried, though not for the obvious reasons.

"Many people think that as florists, we're upset because this inclination toward donations could potentially hurt the sales of sympathy flowers," said Clay Atchison III, founder of inlieuofflowers.info, an informational website aimed at raising awareness of the role flowers play in the grieving process.

“But that’s not what we’re actually concerned about. We’re passionate about flowers and plants, what they symbolize and the comfort they can provide. That’s why we’re in the industry, and that’s what we’re fighting to preserve,” added Atchison, who is also owner of the Texas-based [McAdams Floral](#).

At the funeral service, flowers also help brighten a somber environment and provide a topic of conversation and a tranquil focal point. The study further demonstrated that because of their soothing qualities, sympathy flowers displayed at funerals actually had a positive impact on the emotional well-being of the bereaved.

After the funeral service, arrangements and plants act as keepsakes to brighten the home and in the case of flowering plants, can serve as a living memorial to the deceased, Atchison added.

Florists like Atchison are working to reach out to funeral directors so that they reconsider the wording used in obituaries and announcements.

When some people read, “in lieu of flowers,” they may incorrectly assume that flowers aren’t welcome at all. This could result in a funeral without colorful foliage, which according to the study could be detrimental to the grieving process. “We do not want to dissuade people from requesting donations in memory of the deceased,” said Atchison. “We simply want to ensure that the obituary wording doesn’t deter people from expressing their condolences in different ways – in ways they may feel most comfortable.”

Clay, and the Society of American Florists, suggests that unless the wording is specified by the family, funeral directors should use alternative phrases to “in lieu of flowers” such as:

For further details on the study and more information on this important topic, visit [In Lieu of Flowers](#).

[In Lieu of Flowers](#) is a website where you can locate the resources to select the perfect expression of sympathy after the death of a loved one, friend or acquaintance. The wealth of information on the site ranges from the tribute guide by relationship, mentioned earlier, to a selection of bereavement poems and sympathy card messages. There’s also a section covering sympathy etiquette, as well as a compendium of funeral hymns, and a glossary of sympathy terminology.