

Suggested Outline for a Funeral Ceremony

Welcome

- ☞ An introduction of myself as a celebrant from Humanists UK and why you have chosen a humanist ceremony.
- ☞ A statement of intention – why we are all here – to remember the person you have lost and for you to say your final goodbyes.

A philosophy on life and death from a non-religious perspective

- ☞ This can include an appropriate quote or poem, focusing on how a person will live on in people's memories and how they influenced other's lives.

Tribute

- ☞ An outline of the life and personality of the person who has died, including special memories of those who were part of their life.
- ☞ This can be written and delivered by myself or by family and friends, or a combination of both.

Moment of quiet reflection

- ☞ To enable family and friends to think of their own special memories and for those who have a religious belief to have a silent prayer if they wish.

Committal

- ☞ This is a more formal part of the ceremony to say a final goodbye. I normally ask the congregation to stand whilst I read out some appropriate words or a poem.
- ☞ At the crematorium there are usually curtains which can be drawn in front of the coffin during the committal, so the coffin is no longer in view for the final part of the ceremony. This is purely a symbolic act and a way of showing that the person is no longer a physical part of your life; it might be comforting to know that the coffin doesn't go anywhere during the ceremony and that your loved one won't be cremated until later.
- ☞ If you choose to leave the curtains open, mourners have the option at the end of the ceremony to go to the front to say their own personal goodbye and perhaps place a flower on the coffin.
- ☞ At a burial ground there is also the option for mourners to say their own personal goodbye at the end of the ceremony and throw an individual flower into the grave on top of the coffin. You can also use fern cones, leaves, and sprigs of rosemary, which is the herb of remembrance.

Closing remarks

- ☞ Thanks: possibly acknowledging support from family, friends and neighbours and publicly acknowledging support provided by health care professionals.
- ☞ An invitation for mourners to join the family afterwards for refreshments
- ☞ Final thoughts, such as a well-wishing or poem

Preparation before a family visit

- ☞ It is helpful if you can make some notes, such as key dates and the things you would like to be remembered: early family life and school, work, interests, hobbies, key relationships, retirement and the person's personality and outlook on life.

Other ideas for personalising your ceremony

Music

- ☞ There are three places when music is particularly appropriate during a funeral ceremony and can be used to set the tone: at the beginning as mourners take their seats or make their way to the graveside, during a moment of quiet reflection and at the end of the ceremony as mourners leave.
- ☞ It works well if music lifts as you go through the ceremony, so starting off with a quiet piece and finishing with music which is more uplifting, so it makes it easier for you to leave at the end of the ceremony. For the moment of reflection, it can be a piece that is more medium tempo.
- ☞ You can choose modern or classical music, performed live or recorded. The only restriction is that humanist ceremonies do not usually include hymns as part of an act of worship. However, they may be included for cultural reasons such as singing or playing 'Jerusalem' for an individual who played an active role within the W.I.
- ☞ If you are finding it difficult to choose appropriate pieces of music, try taking a look at your relative or friend's CD collection for inspiration, or think whether they had a favourite TV or radio show or if, for example, they grew up during the 2nd World War, did they have a favourite big band song from that time.
- ☞ If you are having a ceremony at Beetham Hall Crematorium you can access the music library at www.obitus.com using the password Beetham

Readings and Poems

- ☞ You have complete freedom to include what you wish, the only restriction is that humanist ceremonies do not usually include prayers or poems and readings that have religious content. For some inspiration, please take a look at my website at: www.inspirationalceremonies.co.uk/humanist-funeral-poems/

Meaningful objects or belongings

- ☞ Did the person have a cherished piece of clothing or a special hobby which can be symbolised by one or more of their belongings? For example, a hat they always wore, boots or a stick they used when they went out walking, binoculars if they were a keen birdwatcher? These can be displayed at the front or on the coffin, and give a real sense of the person's personality.

Lighting candles

- ☞ Mourners can light tealights either at the beginning of the ceremony or during the moment of quiet reflection in memory of the person who has died. An alternative to this is for the lights to be turned down in the room and for everyone to turn on the light on their mobile phone.
- ☞ There is a beautiful poem called 'Four Candles'; this can be read out whilst close family members or friends light four candles at the front of the room. The poem is particularly appropriate for someone who has died at a young age or in difficult circumstances, as it recognises the strong emotions that people will be feeling. You can find it on my website using the link above.

Tribute of photographs

- ☞ This can be as simple as putting an existing photograph on the coffin or putting together a display of photographs or a slideshow.