

Educating Families About the Critical Importance of Permanent Placement

It's All About the 'Whys'

by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

TODAY'S FAMILIES LACK AN UNDERSTANDING of the importance of permanent placement and memorialization. This unfortunate trend goes hand-in-hand with the rise in cremation, which, in and of itself, is a perfectly acceptable choice. The problem I am addressing in this article lies in what happens next.

More and more families are taking cremated remains home with them, often without a plan of what to do with them. In the long run, home storage of remains creates some unique challenges:

- What do people do with the cremated remains they are accumulating in their homes?
- When they move out of their homes, perhaps into a retirement community or assisted living, do they take all the remains with them?
- And when they, too, are gone, what will happen to all the remains?
- Will their children or nieces and nephews become caretakers?

Other families are choosing to scatter cremated remains, which also can create long-term problems. In a 2019 National Funeral Directors Association consumer study, 48 percent of cremation customers indicated they prefer the idea of scattering remains in a sentimental place. But without a final resting place to know about and visit, many grieving people end up feeling adrift and lost, not knowing where to direct their grief.

As a cemetarian or funeral director, you are a professional with a time-tested, honored solution to this widespread and growing problem. You are the key. You are the person in the position to help families understand the value of permanent placement and memorialization.

If you educate the families you serve, you have the power to help them make transformative choices. Through education, you can help families make decisions that are good for them.

Educational Tools to Assist You

"The secret in education lies in respecting the student." —Ralph Waldo Emerson

For decades, I have advocated for the importance of elements-rich funeral ceremonies. Full-service funerals are so critical because they help mourners, in multiple ways, embark on a healthy path to healing. Unless deathcare providers like you teach them the value of the various elements of ceremony, today's families often eliminate visitations and the use of symbols (specifically, the body), as well as essential actions,

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such as the procession, the committal or inurnment, and the reception.

It is now also time for you to educate families about why they should consider allowing you to help them choose and memorialize a final resting place.

To assist you in your role as permanent-placement educator, I have created two "Final Resting Place" tools: a poster to hang in your arrangement room as well as your lobby, where any visitor can see and learn from it, and a brochure to provide to and review with families.

By design, the tools are practical and easy to understand. The poster educates families about the "whys" of choosing a final resting place, and the brochure goes into more depth about each of these "whys."

When families choose cremation, you have the opportunity—and, I would argue, the responsibility—to educate them then and there about the "whys" of choosing a final resting place and guide them in finalizing all the decisions this choice entails.

In the poster graphic and on the cover of the brochure, you'll see a vague tombstone shape with five colorful bursts in front of it. Each of the bursts contains a phrase that represents a critical "why" for families to consider as they decide whether to choose a final resting place for their loved one.

Being trained to effectively teach these "whys" will allow you and your staff to gain knowledge, learn skills, close performance gaps, and preserve the value of permanent memorialization. The beauty of compassionately providing this information to the families you serve is anchored in the reality that the highest level of a "customer-serve" experience is teaching families something they do not know.

Teaching the Whys

Realizing that many families have never been taught the "whys" of permanent memorialization, you'll be prepared to educate them as follows:

Respect—

Even in death, the body of a precious loved one deserves respect. When we place the remains in a permanent, secure, sacred, and public location, we are forever honoring the life of the person who died as well as the body that animated that life.

Connection—

A final resting place is a special place for you and others to visit, as well as a spot for friends and family to gather and remember. Again, without a final resting place to know about and visit, many grieving people end up feeling adrift and lost, not knowing where to direct their grief. This often happens with inaccessible, undefined, or unmarked scattering locations and can be particularly pronounced in cases when a person's remains are located in multiple spots.

Legacy—

Honoring family heritage is another essential reason to select a final resting place after cremation. The location you choose will become a place for both friends and family to pay their respects for generations to come.

Expression—

Grief is what we think and feel inside us after someone we love dies. Mourning is expressing those thoughts and feelings outside ourselves. And mourning is how we begin to heal. Visiting a final resting place often helps us mourn. It's a healthy way to give expression to our grief.

Peace of Mind—

As cremation becomes more and more popular, many families are accumulating cremated remains in their homes. What will happen to all those urns and other containers in the future? Choosing a secure, appropriate, final resting place for each loved one is a gift to the next generation. Instead of transferring the burden to them, you take responsibility for creating long-term peace of mind.

See Yourself as an Essential Educator

As you and your team begin to educate families about these “whys,” with the help of the tools I've created, you'll find that you will become more comfortable having conversations with families about the roles and benefits of permanent placement and memorialization. You will get better at answering questions and addressing objections.

Why Choose A Final Resting Place



Center for Loss & Life Transition

"Selecting a final resting place is a wise long-term decision for any family."
— Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt, Director

Of course, your job is always to educate, and never to strongarm. You are simply educating families about the important choices they have, because most of them are coming to you with little to no understanding of these choices. Then, you are allowing them to make their choices, and you are honoring those choices, no matter what they are.

By respecting each family's unique concerns, questions, objections, and choices as you educate, you are building trust and strengthening your organization's relationship with each.

In addition to educating each family, your organization has the opportunity to educate your community about the “whys” of permanent placement and memorialization. For example, I suggest offering talks on this topic at local service organization meetings and places of worship.

When used together with the “Why of the Funeral” funeral-service materials I

created several years ago, these new “Final Resting Place” tools will help you educate your families and communities about the importance of funeral ceremonies.

Thank you for everything you do each day to support and educate grieving families. They need you, and the world needs you. **M**



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