



Holding a Memorial Later

A simple guide for after a direct cremation

Choosing a direct cremation means you have decided to keep things simple at a difficult time — and that's a completely valid choice. It also means the goodbye doesn't have to happen all at once, or in a rush. Many families find that holding a memorial later, once the initial shock and raw grief has passed, gives them something a funeral held within days often cannot: time to plan it well, and space to actually be present for it.

This guide is here to help if you'd like to hold your own memorial — whether that's in a few weeks, a few months, or much later. There is no right way to do this. Take what's useful and leave the rest.

Why hold a memorial later?

- **Time to plan properly.** You're not organising anything in the first raw days of grief — you can gather stories, photos and people without racing a deadline.
- **More people can be there.** Family flying in from overseas, friends who need notice, colleagues arranging leave — everyone has a real chance to attend.
- **A ceremony that's truly theirs.** Without a chapel timetable, you can choose a setting, a format and a tone that reflects the person who died.
- **Grief doesn't run on a schedule.** Some people aren't ready to gather and speak in the first week. Waiting lets the tribute come from a steadier place.
- **It's a chance to gather, not just to mourn.** A later memorial may include humour, food, music and celebration alongside the sadness — it often ends up feeling more like a celebration of a life.

When to hold it

There's no deadline. Some families hold a memorial within a fortnight; others wait for a birthday, an anniversary, a school holiday when everyone can travel, or simply until they feel ready. If you're scattering or interring ashes as part of the day, that can shape the timing too — ashes are usually available from the crematorium within 48 hours to two weeks.

Choosing a venue

A memorial doesn't need to be held in a chapel. Some options families choose:

- A favourite park, beach, garden or lookout — somewhere that mattered to them
- A family home or backyard, for something intimate and unhurried
- A pub, RSL, bowls club, golf club, or restaurant function room — good for a social, easygoing life
- A church or place of worship, if faith was important to them
- A community hall, library room, or council venue — affordable and easy to book
- A function room at a cemetery or crematorium, if you'd like ashes present or a niche wall visit as part of the day

Keep numbers, parking, and older guests' accessibility in mind — and leave room for mingling afterwards, not just seated rows.



Creating the Ceremony

Shaping an order of service

A later memorial can be as structured or as relaxed as you like. A simple shape that works well:

- Welcome and acknowledgement — a short opening, and if appropriate, an Acknowledgement of Country
- Life story or eulogy — one person, or a few, giving an overview of their life
- Music or readings — a song, poem, or passage that meant something
- Open floor for stories and tributes — see below; this is often the heart of the day
- A closing moment — a final song, a toast, a minute of quiet, or a ritual such as releasing flowers, lighting candles, or scattering ashes
- Moving into the wake or gathering — food, drink, and time together

You don't need a celebrant to run it, though many families find it easier to have someone independent hold the timing and the room, especially if things get emotional. I'm always happy to help with this, whether that's the whole ceremony or just an order of service document you run yourselves.

Choosing music

Songs can be woven in as people arrive, during a quiet moment, or as a closing piece everyone leaves to. Think about:

- A song they loved, played, or were known for singing badly at karaoke
- Something from a significant era of their life — their wedding, a favourite decade, a shared family memory
- An instrumental piece if lyrics feel like too much
- Asking a few family members for one song each, rather than choosing everything yourself

Inviting people to share stories

This is often what people remember most about a memorial — not the formal words, but hearing a story about their person they'd never heard before. A few ways to make space for this without it feeling awkward or open-ended:

- Ask two or three people in advance to prepare a short story or reflection (2–3 minutes each)
 - Leave an open mic or 'pass the microphone' moment for anyone who wants to speak on the day
 - Put out cards and pens so guests can write a memory to be read aloud, kept in a book, or shared later
 - Create a shared photo table or slideshow that naturally sparks conversation and storytelling during the gathering
 - If public speaking feels too hard for close family, ask a friend or celebrant to read their words for them
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Making it Personal

Other ways to personalise the day

Small, personal touches often mean more than a polished production. A few ideas families have used to bring someone's personality into the room:

- Display their art, knitting, woodwork, or other handmade pieces around the venue
- Set up a table of things that were 'them' — tools, sporting gear, records, cookbooks, fishing tackle, gardening hats
- Serve their favourite dish, cake, or drink — or ask guests to bring a plate that reminds them of that person
- Ask guests to wear a colour they loved, a football jersey, Hawaiian shirts, or whatever suits their spirit
- Play a hobby or craft they were known for — a lawn bowls set out, a card table, an instrument they played
- Hand out something small to take home — a seed packet, a recipe card, a favourite quote, a small planted cutting
- Screen home videos alongside photos, if you have them
- Set up a memory jar or board where people can pin notes, ticket stubs, or small mementos throughout the day

You know them best — the more the day looks and feels like them, the more it tends to help people, both to grieve and to celebrate.

A few practical things to organise

- Venue and date booked, with a rough head count
- Who is speaking, and in what order
- Music chosen and a way to play it (venue sound system, playlist, or someone bringing speakers)
- Photos gathered — a slideshow, a printed collage, or a table display
- Food and drink — catered, potluck, or a simple afternoon tea
- Ashes, if involved — collected from the crematorium, and a decision on present, scattered, or interred
- Order of service printed, or a shared plan for whoever is running the day
- A guest book or memory cards, to keep what's shared

You don't have to do this alone

However involved you'd like me to be — celebrant, help with an order of service, venue guidance, or just someone to talk it through with. There's no need to have it all figured out before you reach out.

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