

# Restrictions limiting funerals to five people, impacting how bereaved individuals grieve

Dr. Simon Sherry is a psychologist and professor at Dalhousie University, and says funerals can have healing benefits for those who have lost a loved one, but humans also have a natural ability to overcome grief without.

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While it is possible to have funerals in Nova Scotia during COVID-19, they might not be the services families envision taking place for their loved ones.

Funeral homes in the province are pushing to be deemed an essential business, but in the meantime do not have that designation. They can still serve the public under the Health Protection Act, as long as a two-metre distance between a group of no more than five people is maintained.

Patrick Curry is the acting president of the Funeral Service Association of Nova Scotia. He says while the restrictions are necessary to help slow the spread of COVID-19, taking away the opportunity to hold public wakes and services will make it difficult for some individuals to mourn their loss.

"When we are on the other side of this, I think there are going to be some emotional and psychological implications for not being able to go through the grieving process for families and for the larger community," he says.

Curry says funeral homes are adapting as best they can to accommodate for small gatherings, like livestreaming services to include individuals who can't be there in person.

"Luckily these days we have access to technology that can permit us to record or livestream a small service so the people who can't be there in person can still view at home," he says. "It is not ideal, and does not take place of being physically there, but at least it is something."

He knows of recent funerals being held in church vestries, with only the priest, organist, two family members and camera operator present. Others, watched the service online.

Dr. Simon Sherry, a psychologist and professor at Dalhousie University, says the social response to bereavement can have a significant influence on the grieving process. He acknowledges usual rituals like wakes and funerals being disrupted by physical distancing could be difficult for many individuals, but he's optimistic we can adjust.

"People have a natural ability to overcome grief and loss because we are adaptive and resilient," he says. "Funerals are only one part of our rituals of grief, and other important aspects like making meaning and reaching acceptance, can be achieved outside of the context of a funeral."

Dr. Sherry says there are benefits to having a broad perspective.

"If you compare the ritual of death you may have had six months ago, most funerals now would be a disappointment," he says. "However if you compare yourself downward to New York or Italy where people are dying in shockingly undignified ways, we are still doing well in comparison."

He says there is no right or wrong way to grieve, but he does encourage those who have lost someone, to find ways to stay connected with friends and family especially during social distancing.