

RememBear

During the Covid-19 crisis this year, we were confronted with a different way of conducting viewings and visitations, funerals and services. Attendance was restricted, thus diminished. Funeral rites and liturgies in Churches were banned for a time. Families were grieving in small numbers, privately in some cases and alone in others.

We noticed there was a missing component of the typical family gathering. The children. Out of fear of infection, many parents did not bring their children to the funeral home for a visitation or service. Those parents became instinctively protective. And as funeral directors know, those children were denied a basic mourning routine of saying "Good-bye". We know that kids grieve too. They cry too. They miss and long for a relative too. As Rabbi Earl Grollman has written, "If they are old enough to love, they are old enough to grieve."

How could a funeral director reach out to one of these kids? Normally we would meet them in the funeral home, shake hands, talk a bit, and become a friend. During Covid-19 pandemic, that has proven difficult. But we thought of a simple way to both connect and provide a remembrance opportunity for a child.

We will give a plush Teddy Bear to kids that attend, and those who don't attend, the visitation, funeral or memorial service of a close relative.

We have termed this outreach to be our RememBear program.

Typically, the recipients of a RememBear have been grandchildren, even great-grandchildren, but they have been children and nieces and nephews, too. We make no distinction of relationship or age. Thus far, we have given them to kids from ages 2-13 and all have been appreciative and thankful. In presenting the RememBear, we suggest that the bear could help remind them of the person who died, perhaps make them feel better. Because, as funeral directors know, fond memories are comforting and can be uplifting. They can bring joy and make one smile. We have noticed those kids at the funeral home have clutched the RememBears and kept it close during their stay. Some of the recipients have not visited the funeral home, and we have been told by their parents that the RememBear was a unique and helpful gift.

The bears were purchased in bulk from an on-line source. The cost was about \$4 per bear. The price is truly insignificant and not a measure of the comfort the RememBear can bring.