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Research Shows Flowers Help Emotional Well-Being

Society of American Florists Says ‘In Lieu of Flowers’ Phrase is a Major Barrier to the Healing Process

Alexandria, VA –Research indicates that sympathy flowers may not only brighten and warm a funeral or memorial service setting, but also have a positive impact on the emotional well-being of the bereaved, according to the Society of American Florists (SAF). The national floral trade association cites a behavioral research study conducted by Nancy Etcoff, Ph.D., of Harvard University, that underscores the importance of flowers in our lives and reveals some of the calming, fortifying feelings they can create.

The Harvard study reveals that flowers feed compassion and chase away anxiety and worries. The research participants lived with fresh flowers for just a few days and reported increases in feelings of compassion and kindness for others. Overall, people simply felt less negative after being around flowers.

“What we learned is that flowers can have profound positive effects on our emotions,” said Etcoff. “We have an innate attraction to flowers,” she added, “and through research we’re beginning to discover why that is so.”

Previous behavioral research by Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, also found that flowers improve our emotional health, according to *The Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*. Specifically, study participants reported feeling less depressed, anxious and agitated after receiving flowers, and demonstrated a higher sense of enjoyment and life satisfaction.

“The bereavement process is a pivotal time when worry, anxiety, and many sad emotions are present,” says Peter Moran, SAF’s chief executive officer. “With such compelling research that shows the presence of flowers make a positive impact on people’s emotional well-being, SAF wants the funeral industry to know flowers are a critical part of the bereavement process.”

“In lieu of flowers”

Moran also says that SAF’s member florists are more concerned than ever about the trend toward the use of the “in lieu of flowers” phrase in obituaries and death notices.

“In light of the emotional benefits of flowers, it is hard to imagine a funeral or memorial service without them,” Moran says. “However, floral industry members nationwide believe ‘in lieu of flowers’ runs the risk of just that,” he adds.

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The “in lieu of flowers” phrase, which traces its roots back to the 1950s, has seen prominent use in the last couple of decades with the proliferation of charitable organizations actively seeking memorial donations.

“Florists continue to be concerned that the use of this phrase diminishes people’s ability to express their sympathy through flowers,” says Moran.

Moran says SAF is stepping up its efforts to deal with the issue by helping florists and funeral directors build better working relationships. SAF recognizes the changing trends in commemoration and memorialization that add to the decrease in the use of sympathy flowers, he says, but also acknowledges the inconvenience that handling flowers can cause funeral directors such as leaking or spilled water, delivery times, and transport issues, which may lead them to use the phrase more frequently in the obituaries they write. “Or perhaps it’s become second nature to insert the phrase when the family designates a charity,” adds Moran.

SAF suggests funeral directors eliminate the “in lieu of flowers” phrase, unless directly specified by the family, and instead use an alternative phrase such as: *Donations may be made to (charity), The family has designated (charity) for memorial contributions, or The (charity) Memorial has been established for those wishing to make a contribution.*

Working Together to Best Serve a Mutual Customer

Acknowledging the need for florists to work closely with their local funeral directors, Moran says SAF provides its members with tips and advice to make handling and transporting flowers easier for the funeral director.

“I encourage funeral directors to actively participate in an open dialog with their local florist,” Moran says, “to make them aware of problems or concerns, and allow the florist to best serve their individual needs.” SAF is encouraging florists to ask funeral directors whether they have challenges with certain container types and sizes, and if they prefer certain delivery times or need help transporting flowers.

“Communicating and working to reach a mutual understanding of problems will benefit the funeral director, the florist and their mutual customer — the family and friends of the deceased,” says Moran.

For more information on the Harvard or Rutgers University research studies, visit www.aboutflowers.com.

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