

Condolence Thank-you Note Etiquette
By Jill Evans Kryston, Etiquette Consultant

Q: My sister's husband passed away two months ago. She is still finding it hard to sit down to write thank-you notes. Are thank-you notes required, and if so, who should receive them and what is the normal time frame to send them out?

A: Having to say good-bye to a family member is a heart-wrenching experience. At such a difficult time in one's life, writing sympathy thank-you notes can seem overwhelming. In actuality, writing notes can be rather therapeutic - it can help a person remember those who lovingly reached out to them as well as it can recall fond memories of their loved one.

Today, there is more leeway in the practice of sending hand-written thank-you notes after the funeral. As a matter of fact, some feel it is a breach of etiquette for anyone to expect or be offended by a lack of a thank-you note or card from the grief-stricken.

There should not be too much pressure placed on your sister during this fragile time in her life, and she may find it comforting if your family offered their help with the task of sending notes. It is fine to put her signature or the family name on her behalf, on a pre-printed card from the funeral home.

According to traditional standards, hand-written correspondence should be sent between two and four weeks after the service. Personal notes are not required for pre-printed sympathy cards or for wake and funeral attendance. However, you should include the following people when sending sympathy thank-you notes: clergy, pallbearers, ushers, drivers in the funeral procession, those who brought food or provided babysitting, those who sent flowers, gifts, mass cards or made donations in the deceased's memory, people who sent long letters, pictures or videos, guests who spoke at the service and any other acts of kindness.

A thank-you note does not need to be long. A couple of sentences are all that is necessary on fold-over stationery. Even a pre-printed card should contain at least one sentence to personally express your gratitude. It is best to be specific when thanking someone for their gift: "Thank you for the lovely white roses" or "Your kind letter of condolence was a source of strength for me and my family." If a financial gift was made, do not mention the amount. Simply thank the sender for their "generous gift" and tell them how their money was spent. You can mention such costs as the services, catering, flowers or headstone.

Above all, grieving people should be kind to themselves during this time. They shouldn't worry about getting all the thank-you notes in the mail at once. Friends and family will understand. It's alright to ask for help in a time of need, but it's even better to offer *your* help to someone who has lost a loved one.

Do you have an etiquette question you want Jill to answer in her monthly column? E-Mail your question(s) to: information@DefiningManners.com or mail to: P.O. Box 1703, Shavertown, PA 18708.

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