

**NFDA**

NATIONAL  
FUNERAL  
DIRECTORS  
ASSOCIATION



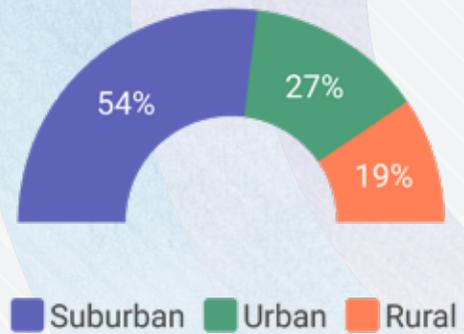
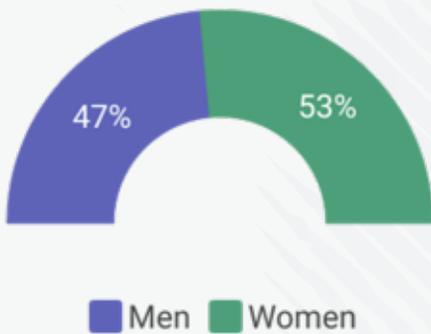
**Changing Consumer Preferences:**

# **A Generational Perspective on Attitudes Toward Funeral Service**

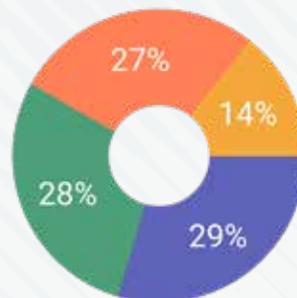
# Consumer preferences and perceptions

with regard to funerals and funeral service continue to evolve, influenced by the emergence of new generations and their unique views on life, death and how they want to be remembered. To explore this evolution, and how funeral service can anticipate and address related trends, NFDA hired Bridge Market Research to conduct research about perceptions of death and funeral service by generation. Four generations were surveyed in the United States: Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z. 57% of respondents had attended a funeral within the past two years. Only two percent had never attended a funeral.

## Who Responded?



Mean Age = 49.2



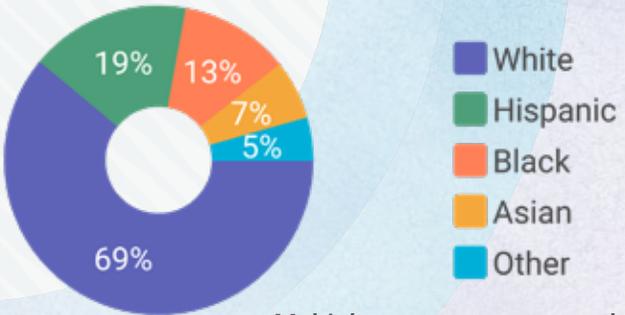
- Boomers
  - Gen X
  - Millennials
  - Gen Z
- 2% identified as post-Boomers

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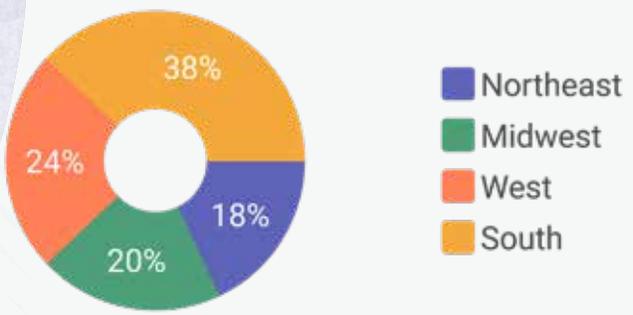


### Race/Ethnicity

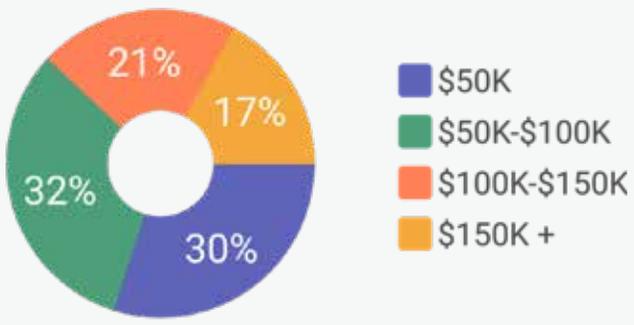


Multiple responses accepted

### Region



### Mean Household Income = \$94,100



# Key Findings

## Beliefs About Funeral Directors

U.S. adults have positive opinions about funeral directors. Younger generations, including Gen Zers, Millennials, and Gen Xers, are even more likely than Boomers to think of funeral directors as important, trustworthy and valuable experts in relevant products/services.

## Beliefs About Funerals

Americans strongly agree that funerals give us time to reflect on another person's life (59%), are for the living to help them grieve and heal (57%), and that it is important to commemorate the life of a loved one with a funeral or memorial service (56%).

## Funeral Service as a Career

One in ten (12%) adults would consider a career as a funeral director. Being uncomfortable working with dead bodies (49%) is the main deterrent. Gen Zers (44%) and Millennials (38%) say they do not know enough about the profession.

## Thinking and Talking About Death and Dying

Most (91%) of Americans believe talking about death and dying is healthy and normal, but one in four (28%) are uncomfortable actually doing it. Nearly one-third (31%) are not comfortable even thinking about their own immortality.

## Discussing Death with Others

Americans are most likely to have discussed death with a friend (66%) or spouse/partner (64%). Boomers (20%) are significantly more likely than younger generations to have discussed death with a funeral director.

## Communicating Funeral Wishes with Family Members

Nearly two-thirds of adults (64%) have had other family members communicate their preferred funeral plans to them. More Millennials (62%), Gen Xers (69%) and Boomers (67%) have had a family member's preferred funeral plans communicated to them compared to Gen Zers (54%).

Nearly two-thirds of adults (62%) have discussed their own preferred funeral plans with family members. Boomers (75%) are most likely to have shared their preferred funeral plans, while Gen Zers (59%) are most likely to not have communicated their funeral plans.

### Preferred Final Form of Disposition

Half of Americans (50%), and even more Boomers (66%), want to be cremated after their death. Gen Zers (37%) want a traditional burial for themselves, more than older generations.

### Importance of Viewing the Body at a Funeral

Half (55%) of American adults, and even more Boomers (68%), do not believe it is important to view the body of the deceased during or prior to the funeral.

### Planning a Funeral Service

Half of Americans (51%) believe it is most important to consider the wishes of the person who died when planning a funeral service. Millennials (50%), Gen Xers (57%), and Boomers (53%) are significantly more likely to feel this way than Gen Zers (42%).

### Religion and Funerals

Only 25% of those surveyed overall feel it is important to include a religious component in a funeral, but of those surveyed, Gen Z was most likely to feel it was important with 28% strongly agreeing.



## The Generations

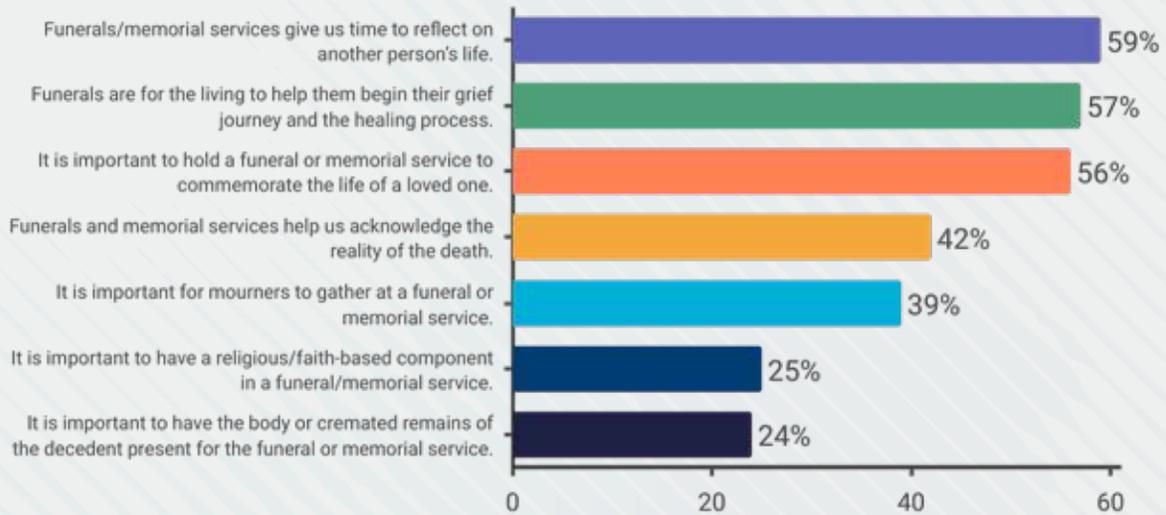
<b>Boomers</b>	<b>1946 - 1964</b>
<b>Gen X</b>	<b>1965 - 1979</b>
<b>Millennials</b>	<b>1980 - 1994</b>
<b>Gen Z</b>	<b>1995 - 2012</b>

We don't know how people's opinions and views will evolve as they age, but given what is known about how different generations feel about death and funerals, funeral professionals can tailor their products, services and even their conversations to meet people where they are while also educating them about what is possible when honoring the life of a loved one.



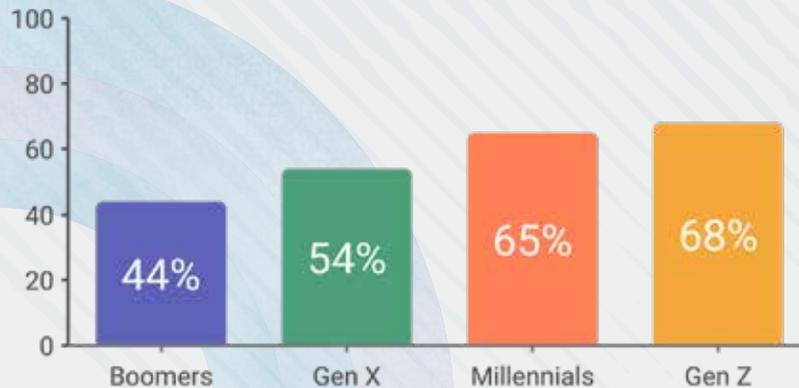
# Beliefs About Funerals

(Strongly Agree – All Generations)



# It Is Important to Hold a Funeral Service or Memorial Service for a Loved One

(Strongly Agree)

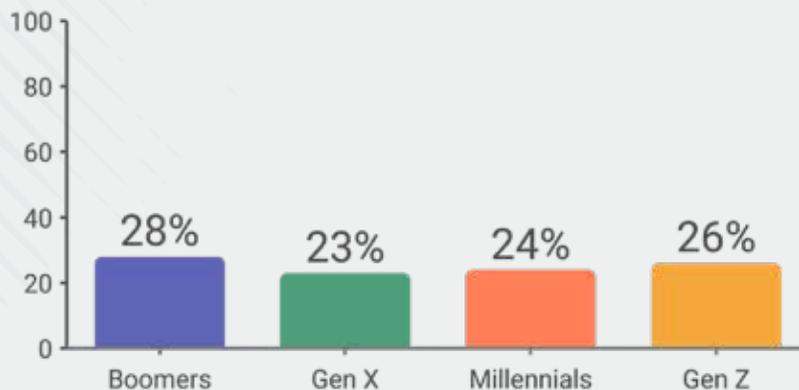


Overall, 56% of people surveyed feel it is important to hold a funeral or memorial service; however, only 24 percent feel it's important to have the body or cremated remains present. Similarly, only 25% of the people surveyed strongly agree it is important to have a religious/faith-based component in a funeral service. Younger generations, especially Gen Z, are more likely to think these things are important.



## It Is Important to Have a Religious/ Faith-Based Component in a Service

(Strongly Agree)



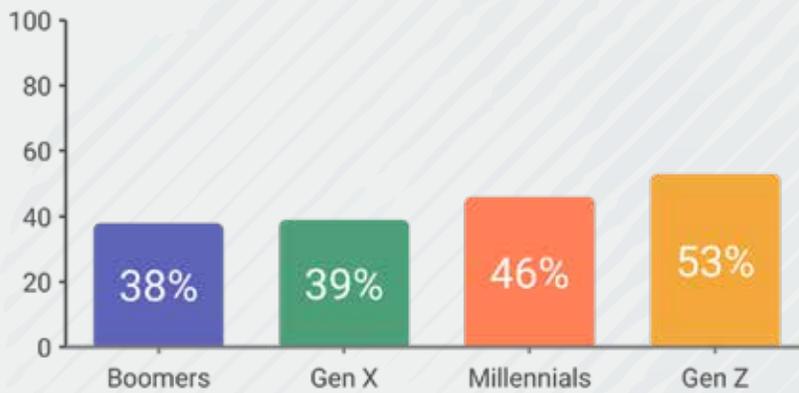
## Opportunity

Use these talking points when encouraging families to have the body or cremated remains of their loved one present for the service.

- *Viewing the body of a loved one or having the body present at the service helps attendees acknowledge the reality of the death.*
- *Having the body of a loved one at the service is helpful for people who are saying goodbye.*
- *Having the body of a loved one present can help guests move forward in their grief, but guests will never be obligated to view the body.*
- *A viewing can be held even if cremation takes place after the service.*

# Funerals/Memorial Services Help Us Acknowledge the Reality of Death

(Strongly Agree)

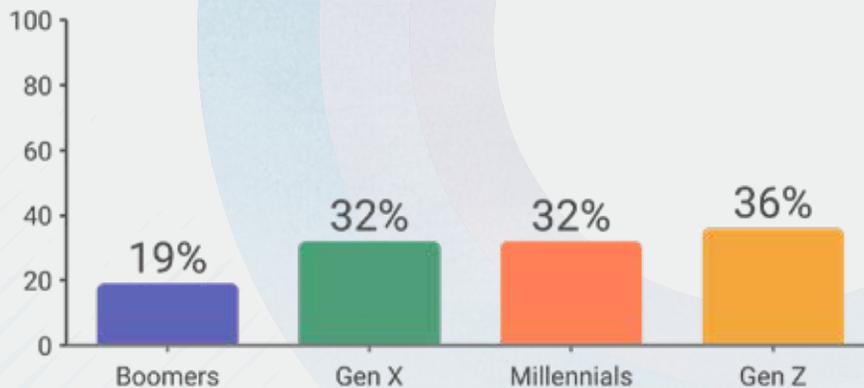


Gen Z is most likely to feel funerals and memorial services help us acknowledge the reality of the death, with Baby Boomers and Gen X the least likely to think the same.



## It Is Important to View the Body of the Deceased During or Prior to the Funeral

(Strongly Agree)



Funeral professionals who helped families after the Columbine shooting stressed that the families whose children were killed wanted one thing: to see their children. So, a team of funeral directors and embalmers made that happen. Understandably, it would have been nearly impossible for parents and other loved ones to accept the deaths of these children had they not had the opportunity to see their child to say goodbye. But even if a death is expected, there can be value in seeing that person's body as part of the ritual of saying goodbye.

Still, more than half (55%) of all adults do not believe it is important to view the body of the deceased during or prior to the funeral. 17% of all adults are unsure.

Boomers are more likely than all younger generations to believe it is not important to view the body of the deceased. Boomers are also less likely to find value in having a funeral or memorial service. Only 44% of Baby Boomers strongly agree it is important, compared to 54% of Gen X, 65% of Millennials and 68% of Gen Zers.



### Reflection

What are your thoughts about viewing the body of the deceased? Was there a time in your life when viewing the body of a loved one helped you move forward after the loss? Was there a time when viewing the body had an adverse effect on your ability to move forward in your grief? How do those experiences influence how you discuss this topic with families and how can you share stories about those experiences to help people understand the value of viewing their loved one?

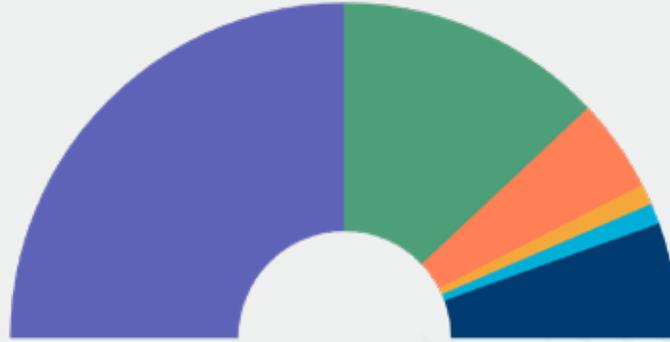
### Opportunity



The Remembering A Life consumer brochure, *The Value of Viewing the Body of a Loved One*, is an excellent resource to give families. It also contains helpful talking points for you to use when discussing this topic with families. [NFDA.org/Store](http://NFDA.org/Store)

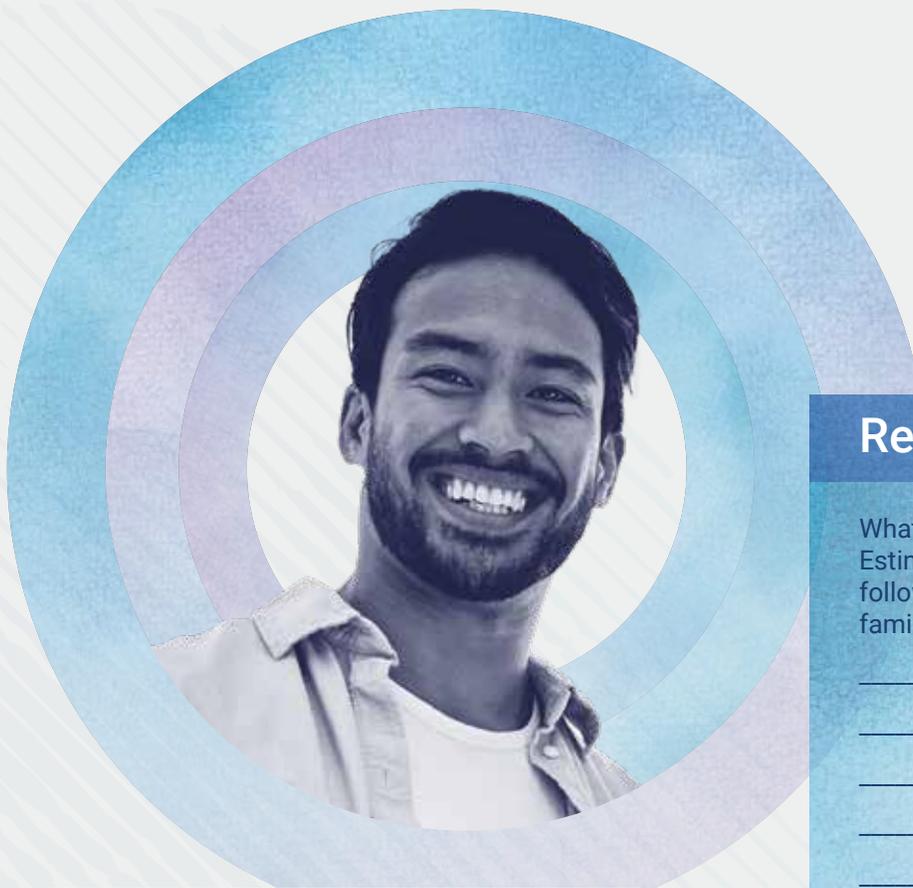
# Preferred Final Form of Disposition

(All Generations)



- Cremation 50%
- Burial 26%
- Green/eco-friendly 9%
- Entombment in a mausoleum 2%
- Other 2%
- Don't know/unsure 11%

	BOOMERS	GEN X	MILLENNIALS	GEN Z
Cremation	66%	50%	42%	28%
Burial	18%	28%	28%	37%
Green/eco-friendly option	6%	6%	14%	14%
Entombment in a mausoleum	2%	3%	3%	3%
Other	2%	1%	2%	1%
Don't know/unsure	7%	13%	11%	16%



### What does each generation want to happen to their body after they die?

- |                |               |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1. Boomers     | Cremation     |
| 2. Gen X       | Cremation     |
| 3. Millennials | Cremation     |
| 4. Gen Z       | Casket Burial |

By 2045 the cremation rate in the United States will be 80%. (2024 NFDA Cremation and Burial Report)

Half of all individuals surveyed prefer cremation, while 26% preferred traditional burial and 9% expressed interest in a green/eco-friendly option. **The preference for cremation decreases as people get younger**, with 66% of Baby Boomers choosing cremation, but only 50% of Gen Xers choosing it, and even fewer Gen Zers (28%) making the same choice. Interest in green/natural burial was higher for Millennials and Gen Z.

## Reflection

What are you seeing in your community? Estimate a percentage for each of the following dispositions chosen by the families you serve.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Cremation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Casket Burial
- \_\_\_\_\_ Green/Natural Burial
- \_\_\_\_\_ Entombment in Mausoleum
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other

Have you seen a shift in preferences over the past ten years? Do you expect a shift in the future? Have you noticed any generational differences?

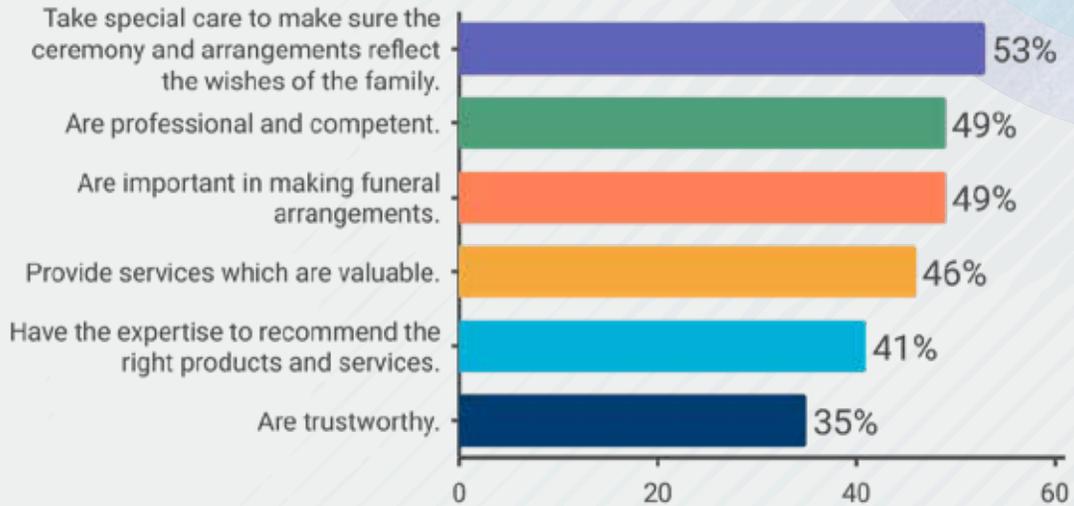
Why do you think Gen Zers are more likely to choose a casket burial? Does it have anything to do with funerals they may have attended? Do social media and the fact that younger generations like to be “seen” have an effect? What about world events and violence? What are you seeing in your community when younger generations help to plan a service?

How do your personal preferences influence how you advise families?

Think about your own preferences for what you want to happen after you die. It’s likely you feel pretty strongly about your wishes. Does that prevent you from being objective when listening to a family talk about what they might want and presenting all of their options?

# Beliefs About Funeral Directors

(Strongly Agree – All Generations)



## Perceptions of Funeral Directors

### Provide services that are valuable

Boomers	40%
Gen X	48%
Millennials	48%
Gen Z	<b>55%</b>

### Are important in making funeral arrangements

Boomers	45%
Gen X	49%
Millennials	51%
Gen Z	<b>52%</b>

Anywhere from 40% to 55% of people surveyed believe funeral directors provide services that are valuable, with Gen Z being the most likely to hold that belief. Similarly, 45% to 52% of people think funeral directors are important in making funeral arrangements, with Gen Z feeling the strongest.

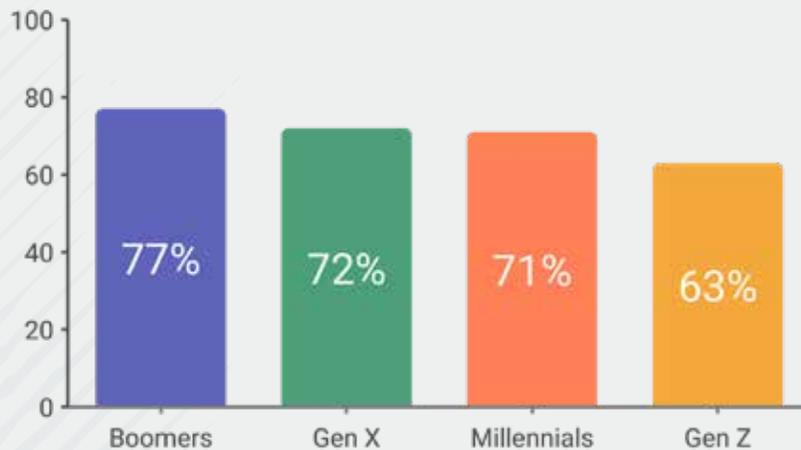
Why do you think Gen Z is the most likely generation to think funeral directors both provide services that are valuable and are important in making funeral arrangements?



## Let's Talk About Death

More Boomers (77%) are very or somewhat comfortable talking about death than Millennials (71%) and Gen Zers (63%).

### Comfortable Talking About Death (Very or Somewhat Comfortable)



#### Talking About Death Is Normal; Many of Us Just Don't Want to Do It

Nine in ten (91%) of Americans believe talking about death and dying is healthy and normal. However, only seven in ten (73%) of adults are very or somewhat comfortable actually talking with others about death. Millennials (71%), Gen Xers (72%), and Boomers (77%) are more comfortable than Gen Zers (63%). Americans are most likely to have discussed death with a friend (66%) or spouse/partner (64%). Boomers (20%) are significantly more likely than Gen Zers (5%), Millennials (8%), or Gen Xers (11%) to have discussed death with a funeral director.

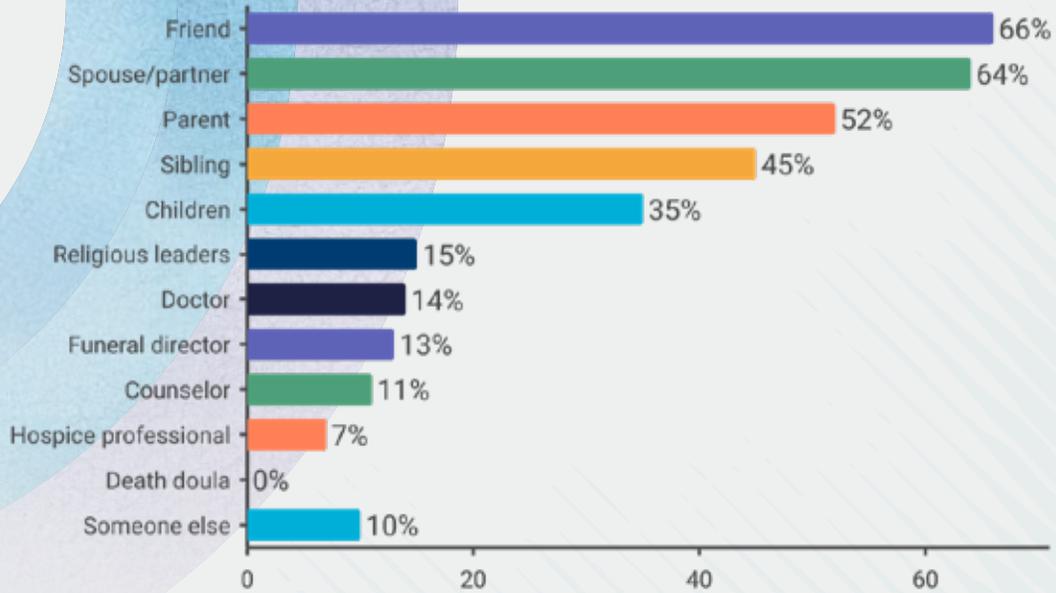
### Opportunity

#### Host a Remembering A Life Let's Talk About Death Dinner Party

Having meaningful and thoughtful conversations about death, dying and how we want to be remembered is a great first step in normalizing topics that have been historically taboo. A Remembering A Life Dinner Party is a perfect – and fun! – way to get the conversation started. Visit [RememberingALife.com/DinnerParty](https://www.RememberingALife.com/DinnerParty) to learn more. The event can be easily adapted for hosting in your funeral home or community center.

# With Whom Have You Had A Discussion About Death?

(All Generations)



# Reasons for Being Uncomfortable Talking About Death

(All Generations)



## Reflection

As a funeral professional, you're comfortable talking about how to honor the life of a loved one, but are you comfortable talking about the act of dying? What experiences with death have influenced how you think about death?

There are many reasons people feel uncomfortable talking about death, which is understandable. 37% of people surveyed said they don't want to talk about death because it may upset others and 34% said it is too depressing. One in ten people surveyed think talking about death might somehow make it more likely to happen and 18% of Gen Zers felt that way. It's no wonder our society is so hesitant to talk about this topic.

Regardless of age, our willingness to talk about death is informed by many life circumstances:

- Prior experiences with death and funerals
- Tragic deaths in our lives
- Health circumstances such as terminal or chronic illness
- Expected or imminent death of a loved one
- Age of the deceased
- Family dynamics
- Faith-based beliefs
- Personal finances

All of these circumstances can have an effect on whether we're open to having a conversation about death.



## Opportunity

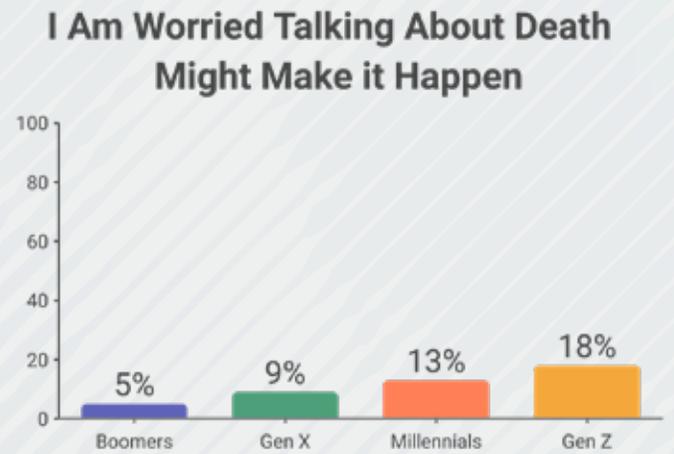
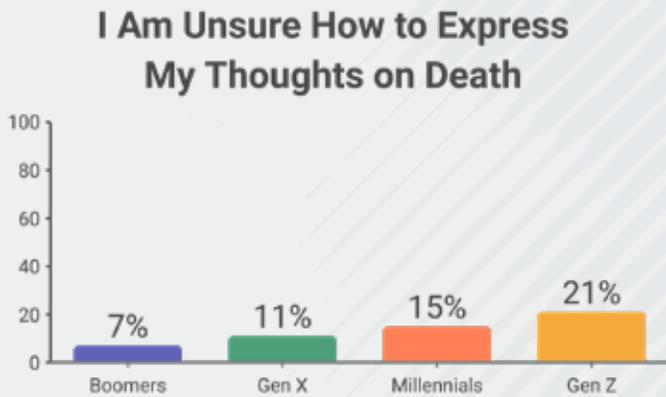
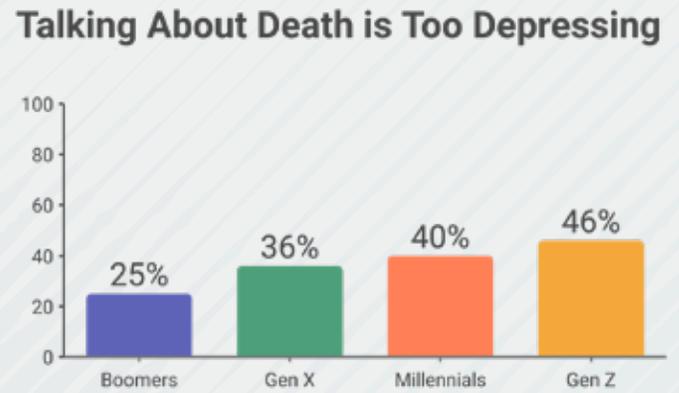
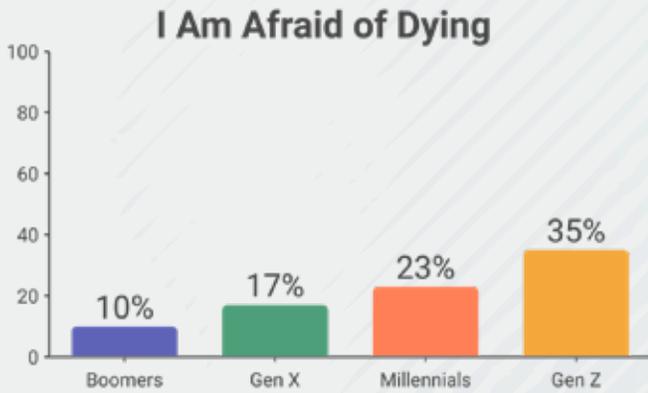
Sometimes the easiest way to make someone more comfortable talking about death is by inviting them to do so. When speaking with families about preplanning, strive to make families feel more comfortable talking about death. Circumstances vary but if you think it would be appropriate, consider some of these conversation starters:

*How does it feel to talk about death and funerals?*

*Who is the funeral ultimately for? The deceased or the living? Both?*

*Is it important for you to view the body of the deceased? Do you think it might help you in terms of accepting the death?*

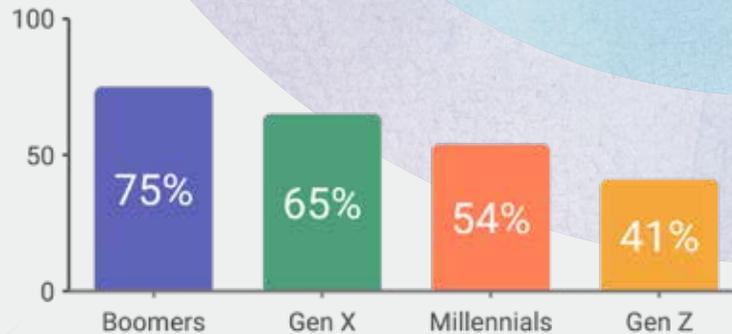
# Reasons for Not Wanting to Talk About Death



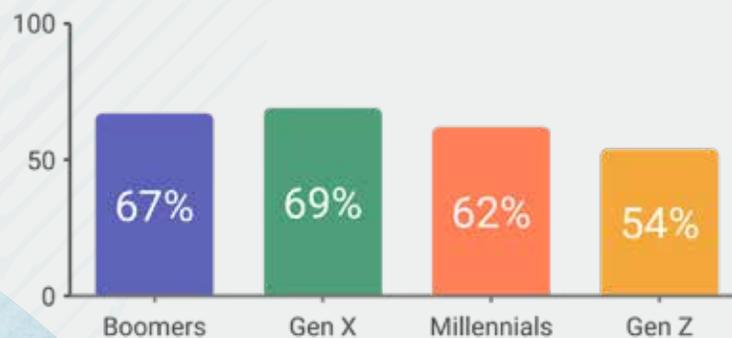
## Opportunity

Interested in learning more about death so you can even better empathize with the families you serve? Connect with a hospice professional or death/end-of-life doula and ask them about what they do and what families experience at the end of life.

## I Have Communicated My Preferred Funeral Plans to Family Members



## My Family Members Have Communicated Their Preferred Funeral Plans To Me

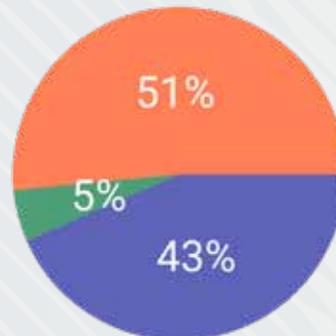


Anywhere from 41% to 75% of people are communicating their preferred funeral plans with family members and from 54% to 69% have had family members communicate preferred funeral plans with them. These numbers are encouraging as they demonstrate more than half of all individuals are having conversations with family members about what they would like after they die.



## Whose Wishes/Needs Should a Funeral Honor?

-  The wishes of the deceased and needs of grievers.
-  The needs of the grievers.
-  The wishes of the deceased.



Just over half of survey respondents think it's most important to honor the wishes of the deceased when planning final disposition and a service. Roughly 40% believe the needs of grievers should also be considered.



## Opportunity

When helping a family plan a service, ask questions beyond what they would like for the service. (They may not know!) By asking exploratory questions, you will be better able to make recommendations that will not only honor any wishes the deceased may have had, but also help grievers move forward after their loss. Ask things like:

*What will bring you comfort as you begin to grieve this loss?*

*What do family and friends want or need to move forward in their grief?*

*How do you want to feel after the service?*

Acknowledge any wishes the deceased may have had, but expand the discussion, stressing that funerals are for the living and that the individual's loved ones also have needs as they move forward in their grief.

## Gen Z May Be a Funeral Director's Biggest Fans!

Is Gen Z surprising you yet? Based on this study, people born between 1995 and 2012\*, are most likely to believe funeral directors provide services that are valuable and are important in making funeral arrangements. They're also the most likely to value having a faith-based funeral service and have expressed a preference for a traditional casket burial.

\*This survey was only given to people 18 years of age or older.



## Opportunity

When a Gen Z family member visits the funeral home to help make arrangements, involve them in the conversation. Invite them to share what would be helpful for them as they begin to grieve and make suggestions for how they could be involved in planning the service or participating the day of. (Who knows? You could be inspiring a future funeral director!)

## Who is Gen Z?

- Think globally
- Connected
- Expect diversity
- Financially cautious
- Committed to sustainability
- Distinctive and disruptive
- Influential
- Value self-care
- Transparent and authentic
- Justice-seeking
- Already saving for retirement, but struggling financially

## Influential World Events for Gen Z

- The COVID-19 Pandemic
- Smartphones
- Social Networking
- Gun Violence/School Shootings
- Terrorism
- The Financial Crisis

## Who are Millennials?

- Comfortable with technology
- Appreciate recognition
- Appreciate personalized service/loyalty programs
- Multitaskers
- Challenge the status quo
- Cautious about personal data
- Avid savers
- Love to travel
- Started saving for retirement a little later, and are also struggling financially

Each generation has events that have had a significant amount of influence on how they live their lives. Whether it was the Great Depression, the World Wars, the Cold War, 9/11, technology, or even things like social media, certain events or experiences can have a profound impact on how we live. Gen Z, for example, has grown up always being connected with their friends, family, and even world news. They've grown up with active shooter drills in their classrooms and they have instant access to information about wars and terrorism around the world. They are acutely aware of deaths occurring around the world and in their own backyard. It's no wonder this generation experiences high rates of anxiety. It also makes sense that this generation would have unique views on death. The financial health of each generation of course also varies. We know that very few people consider themselves to be on track regarding retirement savings, so prepaying for a funeral may not be high on their list of priorities.



## Influential World Events for Millennials

- September 11 Terrorist Attacks
- The Great Recession
- The expansion of the internet and social media
- Gun violence
- The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

## Who are Gen X?

- Independent
- Value work-life balance
- Open-minded
- Entrepreneurial
- Technologically adept
- Value authenticity
- Started saving for retirement even later (~30), are not feeling great about retirement and expect to extend their working years or never retire

## Influential World Events for Gen X

- The fall of the Berlin Wall
- The AIDS epidemic
- The space shuttle Challenger disaster
- The rise of personal computers
- The stock market crash of 1987
- The shift towards a more globalized world
- The proliferation of pop music and related music icons



## Who are Baby Boomers?

- Strong work ethic
- Educated
- Community-conscious
- Goal-oriented
- Adaptable and resourceful/self-sufficient
- May have served in Korean or Vietnam Wars
- Value tradition, customs and religion
- Started saving for retirement even later than Gen X (~35) and are not looking to retire early

## Influential World Events for Baby Boomers

- The Civil Rights Movement/Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Beatlemania
- The Assassination of John F. Kennedy
- The Vietnam War
- The First Nuclear Power Plant
- Woodstock
- Economic Prosperity

## 12% of adults would consider a career in funeral service.

Boomers	4%
Gen X	13%
Millennials	19%
Gen Z	17%

One in ten adults would consider a career in funeral service. Not surprisingly, Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to do so than Baby Boomers or Gen Xers. However, don't count the older generations out. There are second and even third-career funeral directors who entered the profession later in life, many of whom say they are finally pursuing their dream job.

## Opportunity

There's never been a more important time to encourage people of all ages to consider a career in funeral service, whether they are soon-to-be high school graduates, people looking for a second or third career or a retiree looking for supplemental income. Second- or third-career individuals who formerly worked in a service industry (medical professionals, educators, clergy, law enforcement, etc.) may have skills and experience that align particularly well with a career in funeral service.

**High School Students** Download NFDA's free career kit and present it to students at your local high school.

Include young people in making funeral arrangements so they feel included and understand the value of a funeral and what funeral directors do.



### Adults of All Ages

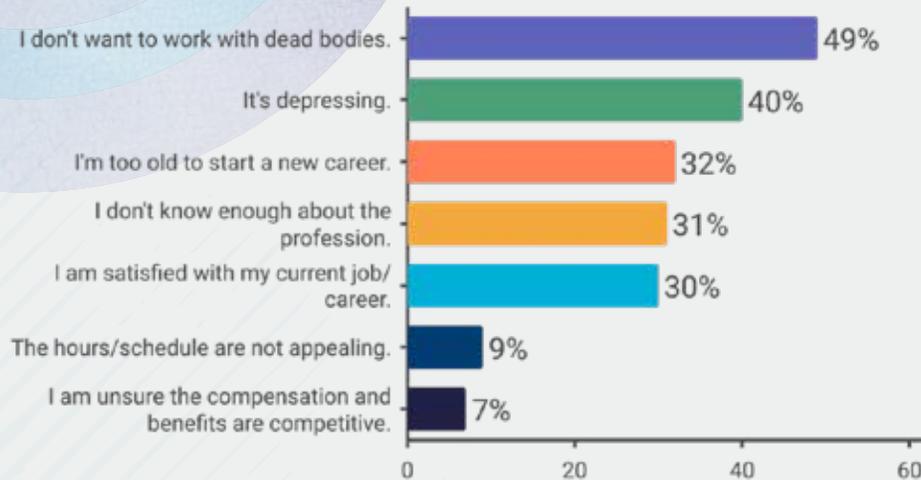
Share information about careers in funeral service by linking to pertinent content from the Remembering A life website from your firm's website or Facebook page:

- Remembering A Life Careers in Funeral Service page: [RememberingALife.com/Careers](https://RememberingALife.com/Careers)
- For active-duty, National Guard, or Reserve members who may want to consider a career in funeral service in civilian life or while still serving: [RememberingALife.com/Military](https://RememberingALife.com/Military)
- The "Is Funeral Service Right for You?" online quiz: [RememberingALife.com/Quiz](https://RememberingALife.com/Quiz)



# Reasons for Not Wanting to be a Funeral Director

(All Generations)



## Reflection

Did you have any hesitations about becoming a funeral director? What appealed to you most and what made you think twice about pursuing this career? How might you use your experience to ease the mind of a prospective mortuary science student?

## Final Reflections

- What data surprised you most about your own generation's opinions about death and funerals? What data surprised you about other generations?
- Does this data reflect what you are seeing in your own community?
- As younger generations become increasingly involved in planning funerals for loved ones, how will you include them in the discussion, especially given that Gen Z and Millennial opinions differ from their Gen X and Baby Boomer parents?
- How can you use this data to better connect with generations in your marketing, advertising and social media?
- What will you do differently in your funeral home as a result of this data?

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