

Ask Miriam...

Individuals and families in the community are faced with challenging issues and concerns regarding their social, emotional and psychological health. Through the cooperation of **The Jewish World**, Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

Q. Dear Miriam,

I recently attended the funeral of a relative. Prior to going to the funeral, I knew that the body was going to be cremated. This would not have been my choice, but I respected the wishes of the immediate family. Several other things were done at the funeral which were strange and somewhat uncomfortable for me, but I felt it was important to go.

If this variation exists just in the Jewish religion, how would I know how to prepare for life cycle events in other religions?

Curious Relative

A. Dear Curious Relative,

In today's world it is indeed likely that you will experience a mixture of cultures and practices, even within your own family. Families have also become much more involved in how life cycle events take place.

You were correct in going because families need support during these times and it provides closure for you. It is wise to get as much information as possible about what will happen at an event so you can opt out of certain parts if you are uncomfortable.

As far as knowing what the etiquette is for life cycle events in other religions, there are some good books available. **How to Be a Perfect Stranger**, published by Jewish Lights, is one.

Knowing what to expect can help you decide if you will go to the event and how to behave there. Remember, your presence is for support of the family, not to question their traditions.

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Q. Dear Miriam,

I am part of a blended family. My mother and father both remarried when I was

an adult. My stepfather was unwelcoming to me and to my sister because he didn't approve of our lifestyles. At times, we were not even welcome in my mother and stepfather's home.

My mother always maintained a relationship with us and we saw her regularly. We didn't attempt to push the issue with my stepfather and he mellowed over the years.

He has died, and I wonder if I should share my feelings about what happened with my mother? I love my mother, but I realize that while I didn't make waves, I do have some anger.

Hurt Stepson

A. Dear Hurt Stepson,

You need to ask and answer some questions. What do you want to achieve by bringing this up with your mother? Do you want an explanation from her about her behavior? Do you want an apology from her? Do you just want her to know your feelings?

You were an adult when this happened and did not choose to raise the issue at the time. Are you sorry that you did not challenge your mother's choices after she married your stepfather?

Is this about you or your mother?

These are hard questions. Certainly, if you harbor anger, you need to deal with it.

Open a dialogue with your mother, but don't close it down with anger. Go for understanding. Maybe your mother did not realize the depth of your feelings.

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Miriam Adler, A.C.S.W., C.S.W., is assistant director of J.F.S. She answers most frequently asked questions. Please send questions to "Ask Miriam," c/o Jewish Family Services of NENY, 877 Madison Ave., Albany, NY 12208 or e-mail jfsnny@banet.net or call 518-482-8856.