



CULTURAL GUIDELINES

FOR WORKING WITH FAMILIES
WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED SUDDEN
AND UNEXPECTED DEATH

Culture includes the beliefs, customs, and arts of a particular society, group, or place. How people respond to issues of death or dying is directly related to their cultural backgrounds. Anyone who works with families should be sensitive to their culture, ethnic, religious, and language diversity. This tip guide provides practical cultural guidelines for working with families who have experienced sudden and unexpected death.




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Practical Cultural Guidelines for Helping Families who have Experienced Sudden and Unexpected Death

- » **Allow families to grieve the loss of their loved one in their customary ways.** For example, privacy may be particularly important to some families during their time of loss, but not as important to others. Attempt to identify a family's level of need so you do not overwhelm them with unwanted support and guidance. In essence, *more* support is not necessarily better for everyone.
- » **Recognize that grief and loss may be expressed differently across cultures.** Some families may not grieve like you would grieve or like other families that you work with may grieve. This does not mean families acting differently than you expect are not affected by what happened. These families may simply express their grief differently. Therefore, maintain a respectful, caring, empathic, and patient attitude towards families experiencing sudden and unexpected death. You should ask questions and listen to families and take your cues from them.
- » **Use an interpreter when necessary to avoid miscommunication.** When using an interpreter make sure to address the family member and not the interpreter when speaking. The level of linguistic skill required when processing highly emotional issues such as the death of a loved one is considerable, so, if possible, choose the interpreter carefully. Do not use children as interpreters when discussing sensitive topics such as death, grief, and loss.
- » **Identify important ethnic or faith leaders in the community and ask them about what support is available for families.** These sources of support may be of greater importance when immediate family members have little or no extended family nearby and need someone with whom to practice cultural ceremonies or rituals.

- » **Avoid personal contact such as hugging or touching unless invited.** This level of physical contact differs greatly depending on the specific cultural group. There are also substantial individual differences within cultures. Some family members may appreciate this contact while others may not. Be aware of personal space as some cultures may find it offensive if you stand too close but others may find it offensive if you stand farther away.
- » **Carefully consider the words you use when speaking with family members about their loss.** Certain words may be upsetting for families experiencing a loss. For example use “loved one” rather than “victim.” For some cultures it may be appropriate to use the deceased person’s name. Avoid statements such as “I know how you feel” or “I know what you are going through” as a grieving person rarely believes you do and this may lead to more distance rather than closeness between you both at this critical time.
- » **Respond to family requests in a respectful and sensitive manner.** You may not always be able to do what a family asks. However, explaining in a respectful and sensitive manner why certain requests may not be accommodated is important.
- » **Avoid answering questions such as “why?”** Family members often want to be heard and not necessarily answered. Instead of trying to provide answers to why something happened, focus on providing families support and acknowledging their efforts to cope.
- » **Be conscious of the volume of your voice.** Some cultures may consider speaking loudly disrespectful, particularly in a grieving situation. If an individual has a known hearing problem then it may be appropriate to speak louder; however, remember that speaking loudly will not improve understanding when language barriers exist.
- » **If you are entering a home, be conscious of your shoes.** Some cultures consider it disrespectful to wear your shoes indoors. Follow the lead of the family members or ask if they prefer that you remove your shoes.

Examples of Cultural Beliefs about Family and Loss

The following examples of cultural beliefs about families and loss are provided to illustrate how cultural beliefs and customs may differ. The following list of cultures is not exhaustive and it cannot be assumed that every family representing a cultural group will hold all of the beliefs described below. A family's beliefs and customs are the product of not only culture, but also lived experience. For example, an individual's cultural identity may include gender, social class, religion, race, and sexual orientation. In addition, there is a great deal of variation within a cultural group. For example, the beliefs of a Pueblo Indian group from northern New Mexico may differ radically from a Dakota, Sioux Indian group from South Dakota. Although the list below helps illustrate how cultural groups may differ, you cannot make assumptions about the beliefs of any specific family experiencing a loss. Instead you should ask questions and listen so the family can tell you what they need. ¶

African American

Family Dynamics

In **African American** families, family members may share responsibilities and take on a variety of roles within the family. Sometimes older children function as caretakers for younger siblings or a parental role may be assumed by a grandparent, aunt, or cousin. Because of having strong bonds with both immediate and extended family members, the death of an extended family member may be as upsetting as a death of an immediate family member.

Beliefs

Within **African American** culture, faith in God and spirituality are common beliefs. Many African Americans may utilize spiritual beliefs during a crisis, which in turn may facilitate coping. For example, bereaved African Americans may take comfort in their religious belief of an afterlife, wherein the deceased continues to live for eternity in Heaven.

Expressions of Grief

African Americans may express grief from losing a loved one through crying or other expression. This may be most evident in African American women and children. The need to “remain strong” during difficult experiences may also be evident, especially among African American males.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

After a death, a showing of social support is often important for **African American** families. Friends and family may gather at the home of the deceased to offer support and grieve together. Funerals may include an open casket, spiritual music, and storytelling. A large, shared meal among grieving loved ones often occurs following a funeral.

Amish

Family Dynamics

The family plays a central role within **Amish** communities. Around 20 to 30 Amish families may comprise one Amish community, which acts as a larger extended family and provides social support to individual families. Men and women typically assume traditional gender roles, with the male as head of the household, financial provider, and religious leader. The wife is often responsible for housekeeping, cooking, and nurturing the children. These traditional gender roles can be flexible at times, with the husband helping care for the children and the wife assisting with work on the farm.

Beliefs

The **Amish** value Christian faith, family, and community and separate themselves from popular culture and modern technology as a way to focus on these values. Amish communities typically do not accept any assistance from the government, as this independence from government symbolizes faith in God and dependence on the church community. Death is often seen as God's will and fulfills God's plan for humanity.

Expressions of Grief

The **Amish** often place value on quiet and reserved grieving. Emotional expressions of grief are often private. Public expression of grief may include Amish women wearing black after the death of a loved one.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

For **Amish** families, funerals are often simple and are typically held three days after the death. The primary focus of Amish funerals is on praising God. At the funeral, the minister will often read scriptures, offer prayers, and preach a sermon. The family of the deceased often rely on the Amish community for continued support. The Amish community may provide daily meals to the family members and help the family with farm, business, and household responsibilities.

Arab American

Family Dynamics

Arab culture often places a high importance on the immediate and extended family. Being loyal to the family demonstrates respect and is often prioritized above individual wishes and desires. The husband is often the head of the household and representative of the Arab family. If there is no husband, then the oldest male may be considered the head of the family household.

Beliefs

Arab Americans often follow Muslim or Christian beliefs. Islam and Christian adherents usually believe in an eternal life after death in Heaven. Death may be viewed as preparation for eternal life, which may aid the grieving process and give comfort to the family of the deceased.

Expressions of Grief

When experiencing the loss of a loved one, weeping is often culturally acceptable for **Arab Americans**. Family and friends usually provide support to a family who has experienced the loss of a loved one through visitation, providing food, and spiritual guidance.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

The funeral ceremony will vary depending on religious beliefs. If the family is Muslim, then cremation is forbidden and burial should take place as soon as possible. In Islam, there are five steps involved in preparing the body: washing the body; wrapping the body in linen or cloth; saying prayers over the body; conducting the funeral ceremony; and burial. Following Islamic tradition, the body is not buried in a coffin and the face of the deceased is directed towards the Islamic holy city of Mecca.

Asian American

Family Dynamics

Asian Americans often hold a strong commitment to family unity. Remaining loyal to parents and showing respect to elders is valued in Asian American culture. Traditionally, males are considered the leader of the family, the financial provider, and the primary disciplinarian of children. Asian American women often nurture the children, communicate the children's needs to the father, and address the family's emotional well-being.

Beliefs

Asian American religious beliefs vary in diversity. Some Asian Americans may identify with atheism, which means they do not believe in God. Others may hold beliefs from eastern religions, such as Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism. Others may identify as Christian or Muslim. For some Asian Americans, the death of a loved one may be perceived as a "good" or a "bad" death. Experiencing a "good" death involves longevity, peacefully dying at home, and producing many children (especially sons); whereas a "bad" death is untimely and unexpected, such as a result of a murder, suicide, or the death of a child. It is often culturally acceptable to not talk about the events of a "bad death".

Expressions of Grief

Family members closest to the deceased may display the most intense demonstration of grief during the funeral. When the funeral is over, all members of the family may be expected to control or to not show their emotions.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

Funeral ceremonies will vary depending on factors such as religious beliefs, country of origin, and family tradition. Although variation may exist, most **Asian Americans** value respect for the deceased. Family elders are often the most responsible for organizing the funeral ceremony. Deciding to bury or cremate the deceased will vary depending on the family.

Bosnian American

Family Dynamics

Many **Bosnians** value close family relationships. Respecting elders is often important and it is common for grandparents to live with the family. Traditional gender roles are often present wherein males are considered the authority and females may be more submissive. Handshaking among men is permitted but women may decline shaking hands with men who are not their husbands, unless the woman offers her hand first.

Beliefs

Many **Bosnians** are Muslim, Eastern Orthodox, or Catholic. There are three main groups of Bosnians: Serbs who are traditionally Eastern Orthodox, Croatians who are typically Roman Catholic, and Bosnians who often consider themselves to be Muslim. There is also a growing group of those who identify as Atheist.

Expressions of Grief

Bosnians may outwardly express grief through wailing, a loud expression which may include crying and shrieking. Bosnians may dress in black to signal a time of mourning. Extended family and friends may join together to offer prayers. Outside support for grief may or may not be welcomed.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

Customarily, only Muslim men attend and participate in funerals; however, more recently, women have been allowed to attend but not participate. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition it is normal for funerals to be extravagant. Burial is common in most traditions in Bosnia instead of cremation as there are no crematoriums in Bosnia.

European American

Family Dynamics

European families often consist of the nuclear family but may include extended family members. Individualism and success are highly encouraged, which may lead to families moving to other areas and communities as families seek their own life goals. Families typically come together to support each other when a death occurs.

Beliefs

The majority of **European Americans** belong to a Christian denomination such as Roman Catholicism or Protestantism, which includes a belief in an afterlife. However, there is a growing number of European Americans that claim no religious beliefs.

Expressions of Grief

Expressions of grief in family members may vary. They may frequently be expressed in a subdued manner. While strong emotions are often felt, they are not often expressed outwardly as funerals tend to be quiet and solemn. While crying at a funeral or visitation is not uncommon, individuals may attempt to suppress these emotions until they are alone or only in the company of family or close friends. Expressions of grief may include storytelling about the family member who has died to memorialize the deceased.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

After death, the deceased individual is usually embalmed or cremated. A visitation often occurs and depending on religious beliefs a funeral may be held. Funeral services may be conducted at a funeral home or church. Dark or black clothes are often worn to the funeral as a sign of mourning. Typically a gathering of family and friends follow the funeral ceremony.

Hispanic or Latino

Family Dynamics

In **Hispanic** or **Latino** culture, the concept of family may include not only the nuclear and extended family, but also a large network of friends and neighbors. Family needs often come before individual needs. Family dynamics are influenced by traditional gender roles. *Machismo* refers to the authority of the male in the family, while *Marianismo* refers to the subordinate, nurturing role of the female family members. Although Hispanics/ Latinos may be very expressive in verbal and non-verbal communication, avoiding direct eye contact may indicate an attitude of respect.

Beliefs

Many **Hispanics** or **Latinos** identify as Roman Catholic, where the relationship between the living and dead is continued through prayer and visits to the grave site. Roman Catholics often believe that a deceased person lives for eternity in Heaven so that all deceased are eventually reunited. Pentecostal denominations of the Christian faith are also becoming more common among Hispanics and Latinos. Pentecostals also believe in Heaven.

Expressions of Grief

Strong emotional expression when learning of a death is often culturally acceptable for **Hispanics/ Latinos**. Although men may weep, they may be less likely than women to grieve openly. For some families, grieving may be extremely private with primary reliance on other family members for support.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

Funeral practices, including decisions on burial or cremation, often follow the family's ceremonial traditions and religious beliefs. Services featuring displays of flowers and candles are often conducted by a priest or pastor.

Micronesian American

Family Dynamics

For many **Micronesian Americans**, the immediate and extended family is important. Families often reach far beyond the immediate family and may include aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins. Children are taught from a young age to respect elders and others in the community. Micronesian families prefer to keep personal matters within the family and may avoid speaking with individuals from outside of the family. Avoiding eye contact and bowing the head is often considered a form of respect.

Beliefs

Religious beliefs may vary for **Micronesian Americans** and may depend on their island of origin. The combination of Christian and indigenous religious beliefs has created a strong belief in the afterlife, and communication with the deceased and/or sprits may occur.

Expressions of Grief

Grief and traditions surrounding death vary depending on which island the individual comes from. Outward expression of grief may be common. Some **Micronesians** believe that emotions need to be expressed so that they do not make the individual sick. The expression of strong emotions is often brief.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

Funerals are generally large ceremonies comprised of meals and speeches, which may last several days. Funerals are a time for community and family to come together to put the spirit of the deceased to rest.

Native American

Family Dynamics

Native Americans often have close bonds with immediate and extended family members and their tribe. For many Native Americans, personal identity is tightly connected with one's family or tribe. Native American tribal hierarchy is important, with tribal elders and tribal religious leaders having the most influence within the tribe.

Beliefs

Native American beliefs may depend on factors like religion, community, tribe, and lived experience. Many Native Americans view life as a circular process without a beginning or end and believe all things work in unison. Some families may call upon the tribal ancestors to help the deceased transition into the spiritual world. Deceased ancestors may be perceived as important spiritual forces and may be called upon and prayed to during times of distress.

Expressions of Grief

When learning of the loss of a loved one, wailing (a loud expression which may include crying and shrieking) may occur in addition to other emotional responses to grief. During times of grief and mourning, **Native American** families may search for meaning through meditation and praying to ancestors. While grieving, Native Americans often value supportive listening versus talking.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

The funeral ceremony is usually conducted by a tribal religious leader. Helping the deceased safely transition into the afterlife is an important belief in **Native American** culture. Family and tribal members may help the deceased find safety and comfort by providing food, jewelry, weapons, tools, etc. within the burial site. The place of burial is important in Native American culture, resulting in the deceased being buried at a significant burial site.

Somali American

Family Dynamics

In **Somali** families, traditional gender roles are often present where males are considered to be the head of the household. Somali children are raised to value and respect their elders. Addressing elders as “aunt” or “uncle” is a common way to show respect in Somali culture, even if the individual being addressed is a stranger. Traditionally, older members of the family will live with their children, usually daughters, until their time of death. Talking about problems outside the family is uncommon and may be considered shameful. It is respectful to avoid shaking hands or making eye contact with the opposite sex.

Beliefs

In the **Somali** culture, death is seen as a part of life and is out of the individual’s control. Many individuals from Somalia identify as Sunni Muslim and believe in an afterlife. Death is viewed as unavoidable and may be considered to be Allah’s (God’s) will.

Expressions of Grief

Excessive emotion is often not displayed when grieving. Family members and the overall community will often come together to visit, provide comfort, food, and other support for the family as they grieve.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

After death, the body is traditionally washed by someone of the same sex and then wrapped in a white cloth for burial. It is generally preferred that the deceased is buried on the same day that he or she died and autopsies are not typically supported. Cremation is typically forbidden in Somalian culture.

Examples of Religious Beliefs about Death and Loss

The following examples of religious beliefs about death and loss are provided to illustrate how religious beliefs and customs may differ. The following list of religions is not exhaustive and it cannot be assumed that every family will hold all of the beliefs described below. Therefore, while the list below helps illustrate how religious beliefs may differ, when working with families experiencing loss you cannot make assumptions about what a specific family believes. Instead you should ask questions and listen so the family can tell you what they need. 

Buddhism

Beliefs

Buddhists believe in reincarnation, which is the rebirth of a soul into a new body. Whether the soul becomes a human, animal, or spirit depends on one's behaviors in their previous life. The goal of the Buddhist is to obtain Nirvana, a state of Enlightenment, which will end the reincarnation cycle. There are variations of Buddhism along with different practices and beliefs.

Views of Death

Buddhism places importance in recognizing that death and grief are universal. Because the belief in reincarnation is central within Buddhism, death is not considered the end of life, but the beginning of a new life. Before death, the individual's spiritual development and state of mind is crucial in helping his or her soul find a happy state of rebirth. Death and grief are viewed as natural and are considered a spiritual aspect of life.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

It is customary to give offerings of money or food to **Buddhist** monks and relatives of the deceased. Because of the variations in how Buddhism is practiced, the funeral ceremony may vary depending on traditions, though funerals are often simple in nature. Personal and significant items may be placed around the coffin. Embalming, which is preventing the body from decay in preparation for burial, and cremation are acceptable within Buddhist customs.

Christianity

Beliefs

Many **Christians** follow the belief that Jesus is the Son of God and the savior of humanity. Christians often consider the Old and New Testament of the Bible, the Christian holy text, as a moral and religious guide for living. Christian beliefs and traditions may vary depending on the denomination.

Views of Death

Christians often believe that individuals will be reunited with loved ones in the afterlife, which is known as Heaven. This belief may provide comfort to those in mourning and help facilitate the grieving process. Because of diversity in the cultural groups who practice Christianity, the views of death and responses to grief may vary.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

A **Christian** funeral ceremony may take place within three to seven days after the death, and is often conducted at the family's church or a funeral home. The funeral may involve the reading of biblical scripture, saying of prayers, and singing of hymns. Christians may rely on other Christians by seeking support from their church, pastors, church elders, family, or friends to help cope with the loss of a loved one.

Hinduism

Belief

Hinduism believes in the cause and effect dynamic of karma, which determines one's fate in the next life. The Hindu's virtuous behavior is guided by Dharma, which is described as the right conduct, righteousness, moral law, and duty.

For Hindus, it is important to end the cycle of reincarnation and for their soul to merge with Brahman, Hindu's all powerful god. The sacred Hindu scriptures are called the Vedas and are considered the ultimate authority in Hinduism. There are many variations of practices and beliefs in Hinduism.

Views of Death

Death is viewed as a natural event and is perceived as the beginning of a new life. When death of a loved one occurs, **Hindu** rituals provide a way for families to acknowledge the emotions of grief, to accept these emotions, and to move on from their grief. It is common for family members to begin rituals immediately after the death of a loved one.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

Traditionally, a male family member performs the last rite which is a ceremony to prepare the deceased for cremation. It is customary for the deceased to not be left alone until the body is cremated. **Hindus** believe that cremating the body is necessary as this allows the individual's spirit to be released. After the cremation the immediate family members may enter a time of mourning which typically lasts ten to thirteen days. It is common for the family to light a lamp after their loved one dies, in order to light the path for the departed soul. No cooking is done in the family's household until after the deceased is cremated, but rather food is provided by friends. Religious chanting and praying by family, friends, and a Hindu priest is common.

Islam

Beliefs

Muslims often follow the principles of Islamic Law by consulting the Qur'an, the holy text of Islam. The Qur'an consists of teachings that the prophet Mohammed received directly from Allah. Muslims often believe that life and death are granted from Allah, who is the primary source of life strength. The two branches of Islam are Sunnis and Shi'ites, which vary in beliefs. Sharia Law is the divine code of conduct for most Muslims, and this law provides instructions on daily living. During Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, Muslims are required to restrain from food, drink, sexual intercourse, and any other impure acts during daylight hours.

Views of Death

Muslims often view life on earth as preparation for eternal life. Although grief will exist, Muslim families may express joy that their deceased loved one is with Allah in peace. Talking about dying and using those discussions to reflect on one's existence is encouraged for most Muslims.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

As cremation is forbidden in Islam, burial should take place as soon as possible. There are five steps involved in preparing the body. These steps include washing the body, wrapping the body in linen or cloth, saying prayers over the body, conducting the funeral ceremony, and burial. Following Islamic tradition, the body is not buried in a coffin and the face of the deceased is directed towards the Islamic holy city of Mecca.

Intense weeping is culturally acceptable for **Muslims** when dealing with loss. Visible grief occurs during a three day mourning period and then grief is no longer visibly displayed after this period. Muslim wives are allowed to mourn their husband up to four months and ten days. Muslim religious beliefs may aid the grieving process and provide family members some comfort.

Jehovah's Witness

Beliefs

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that, Jehovah (God), will one day transform the world into a paradise where the followers of Jesus Christ will be resurrected into new, eternal bodies. Jehovah's Witnesses often believe that the Bible is literally true, and they use this holy book as a guide for moral and spiritual conduct. Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate American holidays such as Christmas and Thanksgiving, and do not celebrate birthdays. Jehovah's Witness members value the separation of themselves from the secular world, because they believe the secular world is ruled by Satan (the Devil).

Views of Death

Death is perceived as a “deep sleep” until the day Jehovah restores the earth. The dead who become restored will either live in Heaven with God or reside in the new paradise on earth, depending on their previous worldly actions. Death is considered a natural process and reflects the will of God.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

In addition to regular meetings of worship, ceremonies such as weddings and funerals are held in Kingdom Halls. The decision to cremate or bury a deceased individual is made by the surviving family. Funerals often take place around one week after death. The funeral ceremony is usually conducted by the church elder, lasts around fifteen to thirty minutes, and involves reading scriptures and prayers and singing hymns.

Judaism

Beliefs

Jewish beliefs will vary depending on whether the family acknowledges the Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform system of beliefs. Some Jewish families may be non-practicing Jews or may practice a different religion all together. Practicing Jews often believe that they will live eternally in Heaven with God after their earthly death.

Practicing Jews recognize the Sabbath, which is a non-working day of religious observance and is observed on Friday evening through Saturday evening.

Views of Death

Death is perceived as a natural process of life and is included as part of God's plan for humanity. After the loss of a loved one, practicing Jews have hope because of their loved one entering Heaven with God. **Jewish** mourning practices are broken up into several mourning periods. The first mourning period involves intense mourning but gradually decreases in intensity throughout the other periods. Forgiveness is an important aspect of the grieving process. Jewish beliefs place a high importance on showing respect for the deceased.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

For many **Jews**, cremation is forbidden and burial should be accomplished as soon as possible. Open casket funerals and embalming, which is preventing the body from decay in preparation for burial, are forbidden. Jewish law believes that exposing the body is disrespectful, because it allows enemies of the deceased to view the body and mock their death. Funerals are typically conducted by a rabbi, or cantor. When the body enters the grave, family of the deceased shovel dirt on the coffin, which is meant to help the family accept the reality of death.

Mormonism

Beliefs

The majority of **Mormon** beliefs are similar to traditional Christian beliefs, although some are specific to Mormonism. Mormons believe that life on earth is a period of testing by God to see if they will honor and obey his commandments. After death, it is believed that the individual's spirit leaves the body and is then judged by God. Mormons consider the King James Version of the Holy Bible valid, but other holy texts include the Book of Mormon, The Doctrine of Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price.

Views of Death

Death is perceived as a time of hope and reliance on God as **Mormons** believe that their loved ones will enter eternal life in Heaven with God after death. Grief and mourning death are considered to be acceptable.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

Funerals are held in a **Mormon** chapel and the decision for cremation or burial is decided by family members. Conducted by the ward bishop, the funeral ceremony typically consists of singing hymns, quoting scriptures, and saying prayers. The funeral ceremony is primarily considered a religious service, although celebrating the life of the deceased may also occur.

Santeria

Beliefs

Santeria is an Afro-Caribbean religion often merged with Roman Catholic beliefs. Santeria combines ancestor and spirit worship with animal sacrifice and other sacred rituals. Santeria has no sacred text or scriptures and is passed along by word of mouth.

The primary focus of Santeria is on building healthy relationships with other humans and with powerful guardian spirits called Orisha's. It is believed that every person is assigned their own Orisha, which is to be worshipped throughout one's life until death.

Views of Death

Some followers of **Santeria** may believe in reincarnation, while others may believe in the Heaven of Roman Catholics. Many followers of Santeria believe that when a person dies, the individual's spirit is freed. The spirit then needs protection so that it does not become captured by someone wishing the spirit ill will.

Ceremonies and Other Considerations

Orishas provide **Santerians** with help and guidance, but only if the person practices the appropriate rituals. These rituals allow an individual to stay connected with the Orisha, which can be accomplished through dancing, drumming, speaking, and eating with the Orisha.

Animal sacrifice plays an important role within Santeria. Animal sacrifices are meant to provide food for the Orisha because if the spirit is not fed, then it will die. Animal sacrifices are a part of marriage, birth, death, and healing ceremonies, and are also used for initiation into the faith community and for Santeria priests to become ordained. It is believed that priests have special powers from the Orisha entering the priest's body. Santeria priests are knowledgeable in traditional medicine and herbs and play a vital role in their community's health.

Additional Resources

We encourage you to do more reading about culturally related attitudes and practices around death and dying. If there are high concentrations of particular ethnic/religious groups in your area, more specialized reading on those groups would be helpful to your cross cultural competency development. What follows is a list of resources that may be useful to you as you continue on your journey of learning about the unique cultural aspects of death and dying.

The A-Z of Death and Dying: Social, Medical, and Cultural Aspects by Michael John Brennan (2014)

Death, American Style: A Cultural History of Dying in America by Lawrence R. Samuel (2013)

Death, Mourning, and Burial: A Cross-Cultural Reader
by Antonius C. G. M. Robben (2005)

Death and Bereavement Across Cultures by Colin Murray Parkes, Pittu Laungani and William Young (1997)

Ritual and Remembrance: Responses to Death in Human Societies by Jon Davies (1994)

Ethnic Variations in Dying, Death and Grief: Diversity in Universality by Donald P. Irish, Kathleen F. Lundquist and Vivian J. Nelsen (1993)

Living Beyond Loss: Death in the Family Edited by Froma Walsh & Monica McGoldrick (2004)

Working with U.S. Faith Communities During Crises, Disasters and Public Health Emergencies by National Disaster Interfaiths Network (2014):
www.n-din.org/ndin_resources/FGS/FieldGuide-HighRes.pdf

Religious Literacy Primer for Crises, Disasters, and Public Health Emergencies by National Disaster Interfaiths Network (2014):
http://www.n-din.org/ndin_resources/FGS/Primer-HighRes.pdf