

## Arranging a Funeral

Following bereavement there are many unfamiliar tasks that will need to be addressed. The very personal nature of bereavement dictates that circumstances will vary. This website is designed to offer guidance on the options available, explain the legal complexities involved and help you make the right decisions.

Arranging a funeral is an intensely personal experience and it will be our objective to carry out your wishes to the best of our ability. We will act as sympathetic advisor and confidant and will be responsible for the efficient completion of the arrangements. We will liaise on your behalf with doctors, clergy, cemeteries and crematoria.

We are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year - simply telephone for professional help when you need it.

### What to do when someone dies?

#### An expected death

If the death occurs at home, you will need to contact the family doctor who attended the deceased (or their out of hours duty system). Once a doctor has attended please contact us and we will be able to provide guidance and support and will, if so desired, attend to remove the deceased to our private Chapel of Rest.

If the death occurs in hospital or in a nursing or residential home the staff will call the doctor and contact the person named by the deceased as next of kin.

The deceased's doctor will normally issue the following:

A Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (in a sealed envelope).

A formal notice which states that the doctor has signed the medical certificate and should inform you how and where to register the death.

[\(See List of Local Registrars\)](#).

#### An unexpected death?

If there are any unusual circumstances, for instance if the death is accidental or unexpected then contact the police and do not touch anything in the room. The death may then be referred to the Coroner. (See 'How or why might the coroner be involved?').

### What does registering the death involve?

All deaths must be registered by the Registrar of Births, Deaths & Marriages within the district where the death occurred. We will inform you of the whereabouts of the Registrar, their opening times and how to make an appointment. We may be able to provide you with transport if required. (see list of Local Registrars) Hampshire is now under one district (with the exception of Southampton & Portsmouth, which are unitary authorities) therefore when you ring for an appointment you may be offered a choice of local registrars to visit.

The Registrar will require the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death issued by the doctor and the deceased's Medical Card (if available), together with the following information:

- Full name of the deceased.
- The deceased's date and place of death.
- The deceased's home address.
- The deceased's date and place of birth.
- The deceased's maiden name, if applicable.
- The deceased's former occupation, where relevant.
- If married, date of birth of surviving spouse.
- Name and address of the informant.
- Informant's qualification for registering.

The following persons may act as Informant, when registering:

- A relative of the deceased present at the death.

- A relative of the deceased in attendance during the last illness.
- A relative of the deceased residing or being in the district where the death occurred.
- A person present at the death.
- The person causing the disposal of the deceased (eg. person responsible for payment of the funeral expenses)
- As Funeral Directors we are NOT allowed to register a death.

If the Registrar issues a Green Certificate this should be handed to your Funeral Director as soon as possible.

Certified Copies of the Entry of Death (often known as Death Certificates) can be purchased for administration of the estate, currently these are £3.50 per copy. The Registrar may issue a Certificate of Registration or Notification of Death (free of charge) for you to send to the Department of Works and Pensions with any pension or allowance books.

Registration must be carried out within 5 days from the date of death. This may be extended if authorised by the Registrar.

### Registration 'By Declaration'

Where a death from natural causes occurs in England and Wales and the principle Informant lives a distance from the Registration district in which the death must be registered, it is permissible for the registration to take place 'By Declaration' at a convenient registry office within England and Wales.

Before using this procedure the Informant should contact the Registry office nearest to where the death occurred ('Registrar A') for guidance and clearance.

The Informant then makes an appointment with the convenient Registry office ('Registrar B') and attends with the necessary information and the 'Medical Certificate of Cause of Death' issued by the doctor. As this certificate is normally located at the place of death it must either be forwarded to the Informant or it can be handed to Registrar A who can fax it to Registrar B.  
(in the interests of security a fax can only be accepted if sent from Registrar A to Registrar B)

If the Coroner is involved, the form that replaces the doctor's Medical Certificate must be faxed instead from Registrar A

Once the above certification or fax has been received by Registrar B and the declaration has been made by the Informant the document(s) will be sent by first class post to Registrar A who will register the death and despatch, by return first class post, the Green Certificate (if applicable); the DWP form, and the Certified Copies of the Entry of Death, if paid for.

Whilst this procedure may be more convenient for the Informant, it will result in an additional delay before the funeral takes place. A return journey to Registrar A may be well worthwhile to avoid unnecessary hold-up.

### How or why might the coroner be involved?

Naturally a sudden death together with the Coroner's involvement can be very distressing. You may have a number of questions. As trained professionals we are fully acquainted with all procedures and we are here to help and guide you. Be assured that the Coroner and their officers are working in your interest.

There are a number of reasons why a death may be referred to Her Majesty's Coroner and under such circumstances different procedural requirements and registration procedures will be necessary. However, these should not give you any cause for alarm.

The Coroner is usually qualified as a Doctor or Solicitor and is a judicial officer independent of local and central government who is required to act in accordance with the law. Any sudden or unexplained death may be reported to the Coroner regardless of how it may appear to have happened.

Sometimes the Coroner will be able to determine by simple enquiry whether the death was due to natural causes and that a Doctor is willing to issue a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. If so the death is registered in the usual manner.

If this is not the case the Coroner may require a post-mortem examination. This will often indicate that the death was due to natural causes and in such cases there is NO inquest. The Coroner will send a certificate to the Registrar so that the death can be registered. For a burial the Green Certificate will be issued by the Registrar to hand to the Funeral Director. For a cremation the Coroner will issue a special certificate directly to the Funeral Director or Crematorium and no Green Certificate is required.

If the death is due to unnatural causes (i.e. an accident) the Coroner is obliged to hold an INQUEST. This is a formal enquiry to establish a) the identity of the deceased; b) when, where and how the death occurred; c) the cause of death.

Usually an inquest will be adjourned to allow the funeral to take place. Once all the relevant facts have been established the inquest will be reopened. This may be some weeks later. The Coroner will issue special certificates depending on whether it is a burial or cremation. Preliminary Death Certificates may be obtained from the Coroner to help towards the administration of the estate.

## How do I choose the right kind of funeral?

Our task is to help create a ceremony which gives full value and importance to the wishes of the family and the deceased. The funeral may be according to a Christian rite, other religion, or a nonreligious service that uses music and words. You will receive advice and support through these decisions and, naturally, you have time to consider the options.

## Burial or Cremation?

### What happens at a burial?

If you propose to use a new plot in a Cemetery or Churchyard we will advise you of the options available. For a burial in an existing grave in a public cemetery the Deeds of the grave may be important. The Deeds may be with the deceased's personal papers. There will be no Deed if the grave is in a Churchyard.

Usually there will be a funeral service in a church/chapel or at the graveside. The interment can be a very emotional experience and you may wish this part to be for close family only or you may welcome the support from friends.

During the brief words of committal the coffin is gently lowered into the grave - your Funeral Director may scatter a little earth or petals. You may also wish to scatter a little earth on the coffin yourself or to place a flower in the grave. Afterwards the floral tributes will be displayed nearby for everyone to see.

We can arrange for a temporary marker to be placed on the grave whilst the necessary time elapses before a permanent memorial can be erected.

### What happens at a cremation?

The funeral may begin with a religious ceremony in a church or perhaps a nonreligious ceremony at another location away from the Crematorium. Alternatively the whole ceremony may be in the Crematorium chapel. Usually a twenty to thirty minute service is the maximum available, although an additional time can be booked at an extra cost. If you are making your own way to the Crematorium please allow yourself plenty of time.

Often the family will follow behind the coffin as it is borne into the chapel. However many people choose to go in ahead to settle themselves first. During the words of committal the coffin will be hidden from sight by a curtain or may descend from view depending on the crematorium. You may prefer to request that the coffin should remain on view in the Chapel until you have left. All cremations are carried out individually to a strict Code of Practice. Some Crematoria are unable to accept coffins above specific dimensions. If this occurs we will advise you of the alternatives.

## Music at a funeral

These days the personal choice of appropriate music can be very important. We will be able to advise you on the various options available and also help with any additional equipment required. Local Crematoria have different facilities for playing pre-recorded music from your own collection or downloaded music from their own system. Please discuss this with your Funeral Director who will be aware of local arrangements.



It is essential that any recorded music is discussed and agreed at least 72 hours in advance of a funeral. This will ensure that there is plenty of time for delivery, downloading or rehearsal and may avoid disappointment if something is handed to the Funeral Director at the last minute.

Wessex Vale Crematorium and Southampton Crematorium use the Wesley Music System ([www.wesleymusic.com](http://www.wesleymusic.com)). Each Crematoria have their own standard list, but Wesley Music are able to source the vast majority of recorded music, if given sufficient time and as much detail as possible.

If the service is in church we may need to obtain permission from the incumbent before certain music can be played.

## Putting a notice in the paper

You may wish to announce the death, and give details of the funeral arrangements in a local, national or international newspaper. We can assist you with this and help with the wording should you need it. We can advise you regarding instructions for flowers or charitable donations. You may also wish to consider an 'acknowledgement' notice at a later date.

## How is the deceased cared for?

After the removal from the place of death the deceased is cared for at our premises prior to being placed in the chosen coffin for viewing in readiness for the funeral. The deceased may be dressed in a gown provided by us or clothing provided by the family (please note that some crematoria have restrictions about personal clothing).

## May I see the deceased before the funeral?



Yes, of course. Families may like the opportunity to visit the Chapel of Rest and our staff will always discuss the matter beforehand if you are uncertain. Only occasionally may our professional opinion be that this is inadvisable. We will accompany you into the Chapel if you are concerned about this visit.

Our beautifully appointed private Chapels of Rest are open by appointment. Photographs, letters or other small personal items can be brought to the chapel and placed in the coffin but you should discuss this with your Funeral Director to ensure that there are no restrictions at the Crematorium.

## Jewellery

It is important that instructions left by the deceased with regard to personal effects (i.e. Wedding rings) are observed. The family may also have specific wishes in this respect. If such items are to be removed your Funeral Director should be instructed by the executors and arrangements made for their collection BEFORE the funeral.

## What about the ashes?

Whatever your final decision you will be given time to consider all the options. You may wish us to hold the ashes until you have decided, although we reserve the right to scatter them after a year if no other instructions have been received.

We have a large selection of suitable caskets and urns for the ashes, including memento and miniature urns for keepsakes. Please ask us for full details.

## What happens about flowers?



Floral tributes can be an expression of respect and love for a life. When there are more than a small number of tributes we generally remove the message cards and place in a presentation booklet for your collection. We can assist you with ordering Floral Tributes

## What happens about donations?

Nowadays more and more families choose to have donations to a charity instead of, or in addition to, flowers. It may be that the deceased has indicated a particular charity to benefit or that the family need to consider an appropriate one.

The details of the donations are often published in the newspaper announcement and are usually sent care of the Funeral Director.

Each donation will be acknowledged by us (where an address has been supplied) including the opportunity to Gift Aid. After approximately six weeks a list will be compiled for the family showing the total collected. The cheques will be sent to the nominated charity (or charities) requesting an acknowledgement be sent to the family.

## Can you provide printed service sheets?



Yes, we can. Many people like to keep some after the service and send one to anyone who may not have been able to attend. We have a number of examples with a choice of colour, styles, motifs, typefaces or photographs for the front cover, in full colour or black and white.

It is essential to liaise with the officiant to help compile the content and sequence of the ceremony.

## Can I have a record of those who attended?

We can provide pre-printed attendance cards (often known as pew cards) for members of the congregation to complete. They also give the opportunity to inform you of their connection to the deceased.

We can also provide a leather Book of Remembrance for the congregation to complete.

## What if the funeral is unusual in any way?

Every funeral is 'unique' in that it reflects the wishes of the family and takes place in different circumstances. Today funerals have become much more personalised and we are accustomed to receiving what may well be considered unusual requests.

For example vintage hearses, motorcycle hearses, pipers, soloists, catering, sound systems, choirs, jazz bands, buglers, doves, recording of the service, marquees at the ceremony or graveside. Obviously this list is not exhaustive and if you are considering anything else please do not hesitate to ask.

## Funerals at a distance

It may be that you wish for the funeral to take place away from the local area. Distance is no object and we will give you an estimate of the cost involved.

## Burials at Sea

We have the experience and expertise to carry out this service and will assist in the liaison with the appropriate authorities in order to gain the necessary permission. As the specification is quite exact we will be able to give you an estimate of the cost involved and arrange a date and time (subject to weather conditions!).

## International Repatriations

It may be that you wish the deceased to be moved to or from another country. As member of The National Association of Funeral Directors we are fully conversant with the complexities of these types of funerals and will liaise with the necessary consular officials, airlines, and Coroner to ensure the special requirements are properly handled.

## Exhumations

Occasionally it may be necessary to move the deceased from one grave or ashes plot to another. This can be for legal reasons or because of family wishes and may sometimes involve considerable distance. We can discuss your requirements and the legal necessities should you need to consider this.

## How do I contact a bereavement counsellor?

The support and advice of your Funeral Director will not necessarily end with the funeral. Should you feel the need for any additional help please do not hesitate to contact us. It may be that you (or one of your family or a child) requires some support and could be helped through this difficult time by a trained and skilled counsellor who will be able to 'lend an ear'.

We will be able to put you in contact with counsellors who work closely with us.

## What should I tell the children?



Understandably this is a difficult subject and we are often asked whether children should attend a funeral. Naturally this will depend upon the age of the child, their relationship with the person who has died, and whether they have expressed a wish to do so. Each child is different and will react as an individual. From our experience you may find the following information helpful.

It is important that a child is told as quickly as possible when there is a death in the family. The news should be given by the person closest to them in a simple and straightforward manner. Do not be afraid to use the words 'died' or 'dead' and be careful with the pictures you may create in the child's mind - they need to agree with what the child actually knows or has seen.

Encourage the child to talk about the deceased and to ask questions; answer these briefly but truthfully - you may be surprised how supportive and accepting the child can be.

To help you, we recommend a book called 'Badger's Parting Gifts' (ISBN 0-00-664317-5) alternatively 'Waterbugs & Dragonflies' (ISBN 0-8264-7181-1) available from all good bookstores.

In addition we have a supply of 'Remember Me Always' (ISBN 978-0-9550757-3-5) an excellent handbook to help bereaved families care for grieving children – please feel free to ask for a copy.

## I need to administer the estate.

### What do I have to do?

Before an estate can be realised and distributed amongst the beneficiaries a Grant of Probate or Letters of Administration will be required. The simplest way to ensure this is carried out correctly is to instruct a Solicitor or Bank to act for you. This need not necessarily involve you in great expense, but it will ensure that all the correct allowances are applied for, bills are paid, returns to the relevant tax offices are dealt with promptly, and any life assurance or pension entitlements are correctly claimed.

Probate is required where the deceased HAS left a Will. The Will must be 'proved' before the Probate Registry of the High Court. Upon completion the executors named in the Will are able to administer the estate.

Letters of Administration are required where the deceased HAS NOT left a Will. The deceased is said to have died Intestate and the question then arises as to who should administer the estate. Here again application has to be made to the Court, usually by the next of kin, and when the Court is satisfied, they will issue a document (Letters of Administration) appointing the applicant as administrator of the estate.

Where the estate is small it is possible for the assets to be realised without making applications for a Grant. The local Probate Registry Office (found in the Telephone Directory under Probate) will advise you of the maximum asset value applicable in such circumstances.

Motor Insurance cover on a vehicle owned by the deceased ceases upon death. The insurance company should be informed immediately and arrangements made for a transfer. The vehicle registration document should be returned for transfer of ownership and the deceased's driving licence should be returned to the DVLC.

Any current passport should be returned to The Passport Office.