

What To Do When Someone Dies

A brief and reassuring guide to help you through



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The paperwork and procedures

Heart And Soul Funerals can help you with everything. The precise order of events depends on circumstances, but the main points are:

If expected and at home, the death needs to be verified. Call the GP or out-of-hours doctor. Qualified nurses can also do this. If in a hospital, hospice or nursing home, or if you have 'Hospice at Home', they will do this for you. If the death was unexpected, the emergency services and Coroner will need to become involved and you must call them.

Sit with the person awhile if you want to, before arranging for them to be taken into care. Call **Heart And Soul** funeral directors when you are ready. 01803 840779 / 01364 643522 24 hours.

Normally you collect the Medical Certificate of Cause Of Death (MCOCOD) from the doctor, hospital or hospice, and register the death at the local Registrar's office within 5 days of the death.

But with Covid procedures have changed. The GP or doctor at the hospital or hospice will email the MCOCOD direct to the Registrar. The Registrar will then call you to make an appointment or you can call them. This appointment may be via telephone or face to face depending on their current policy.

If the Coroner is involved they will advise you when Registration can take place.

Normally the Registrar would give you a Certificate for Burial Or Cremation (known as the Green Form) and certified copies of the Death Certificate. Currently with Covid the Green Form is sent straight to the funeral director and the Death Certificates are sent to you if not attending the Registrar's Office. You can pay for them over the phone.

Registration can be done by:

- someone present at the death
- the occupier of the house where the death occurred or an administrator of the hospital
- the person making arrangements with the funeral directors.

Various things can be sorted out as part of the registration process. The 'Tell Us Once' service allows you to report the death once, have information passed to other government organisations on your behalf.

Take as many of the following documents as possible to your appointment:

- Passport
- Driving Licence
- National Insurance Number
- Blue Badge
- National Bus Pass.

If there is to be a cremation your funeral director will ask you to complete an Application for Cremation Form.

If the Coroner is involved they may carry out a Post-Mortem to establish the cause of death. Once successfully completed the registration can take place. If the cause of death is not established there may be an Inquest. This can take months but the person who has died's body will be released for burial or cremation and an Interim Death Certificate produced. Registration will not take place until the Inquest is complete.

First of all, don't rush...

It is nearly always a shock when someone dies, even if they have been ill or the death was expected. It is even more difficult when the death is sudden and unexpected. In the case of an unexpected death, it is likely that the ambulance service and the police will be involved, and the death may become a case dealt with by the Coroner.

But most deaths are not unexpected, and it's important to remember that when someone dies there is no need to rush into making hasty decisions about what to do. If you want to, quietly spend a little time sitting with the person who has died, so you can begin to say goodbye, and let yourself take in what has happened. When you are ready, arrangements can be made to bring the person who has died into our care.

When someone dies, there is often so much going on at once that you can't think straight, or believe what's happened. If at all possible, call a neighbour, friend or relative and ask them to come and be with you. Most people are really pleased to help you at such a difficult time. They may have experienced the same thing themselves.

Your concentration and emotions might be all over the place; you may be in shock as well as grief. Or, it may feel eerily as if nothing has changed because you can't believe it. This is normal. Almost everyone goes through this at first, so if this is you, just trust it won't always be like this.

Meantime, you have to get on with tasks that can't wait. But there are a lot fewer of these than you might think.

The first things that must be done are:

to call the GP or doctor to come and certify the death (if in a hospital, hospice or nursing home they will deal with this for you); to call us at Heart And Soul Funerals (01803 840779 available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week)) and we will come and take the person who has died into care for you. We will meet with you to guide you through the following days leading to the funeral.

The day or two after the death

At Heart And Soul Funerals we are here to be a gentle guiding hand and to accompany you on this journey, which is unfamiliar to you but which we have made with many families. We will spend time listening to you. We need to build an understanding together of your own best way to take care of the person who has died and their funeral. You have at least two weeks before the funeral must happen (sooner or longer if you wish), so again you've time to make choices before committing yourself to a plan of action, and time to adjust any plans before the funeral. We don't expect you to get it all right first time; you'll change your mind about things – that's fine.

If you already know if the person who has died is to be cremated rather than buried, please let us know and we will inform the doctor so that the doctor's cremation forms can be completed.

Although we as undertakers will be looking after the body of the person who has died for you, or we can help you to do this at home for a while, they remain yours throughout the process. If you want to be involved in caring, tending, dressing or you want to spend time with the body of the person who has died, then please let us know. Doing this can feel very comforting – extending the care you gave the person when they were alive..

Arranging the funeral

The next most important thing to spend your time on is arranging a burial or cremation with the kind of ceremony that's important to you and the close circle of the person who has died. Talk among your family and close friends about ideas for the ceremony. You'll all want to look back and know you did the best you could, so let everything that can wait – which is probably most of it – wait, till after the funeral.

Firstly, you need to decide between burial or cremation. If the person who died hadn't made their wishes clear, this can often be an intuitive or emotional decision. Burial can take place in a churchyard, cemetery, a woodland burial ground, or even on private land. Cremation needs two doctors' certificates and these can take a few days to obtain. Once you have a date in mind, it's best for the burial or crematorium reservation to be made as soon as possible. It can always be changed.

The person conducting the ceremony has to be available on the day, so they must be contacted before you commit yourself to a date. You can choose an independent funeral celebrant, or a minister, or a friend can conduct the ceremony; but mostly, people don't know of anyone, and we can help here.

There are many different choices you can make, if you wish, to create a very personal and individual ceremony. How do you want the event to feel; formal or more relaxed? traditional or contemporary? spiritual, religious or secular? simple or elaborate?

If you can, locate the will and any funeral instructions. Ask around the close circle – did the person ever talk about their funeral wishes? These sorts of important decisions can be taxing, so take time to discuss them first. Discuss these alternatives with us and

with each other before you all decide – we will be happy to wait for most decisions, and put your needs first, so don't worry about inconveniencing anyone.

To let everyone know about the death and the funeral, you can put a notice in the local or national newspaper. You could ask a friend or relative to ring round to let everyone know, perhaps using the address and telephone book of the person who has died. There may be people you'd rather talk to yourself, but it can be exhausting to try and talk to everyone. Of course social media is now a common way to let people know.

So now you may have a date and a time for the funeral, an idea about the type of ceremony you'd like and who will conduct it, whether a burial or a cremation and a way to let most people know about the funeral. And we can help you with the information you need to think about the other things and put everything in place for you. In summary:

- Decide who is to attend, and a time and date for the funeral.
- Choose a venue and caterers for gathering after the funeral.
- Talk about the style of the funeral; and whether you'd prefer a minister, a celebrant or a friend to conduct the ceremony.
- Choose a coffin from our wide range and transport for the coffin.
- Meet the person who will conduct the ceremony, and discuss music, songs, readings, speakers, eulogy, procession, candles, etc.
- Arrange to visit and sit with the person who has died, if you wish.
- Arrange flowers, and any donations to charity.
- Consider a memorial or a headstone, and what to do with the ashes later.

Further considerations

The ceremony needn't be held at the crematorium or burial ground. **Heart And Soul** will support you to find an appropriate space. We have a lovely ceremony hall by the River Dart. It can be held anywhere with the owner's permission to have the coffin present, such as a function room or a village hall, before moving on for a burial or cremation at the burial ground or crematorium. If you want more time than the crematorium usually offer, we can book a double time period.

You can decorate any ceremony space with personal artefacts, flowers, whatever you'd think of for any family occasion – it's your family's event, and your choice of style.

There's a choice between several different materials and styles of coffins. You can come in to us and see the range, or view them online at www.heartandsoulfunerals.co.uk/coffins-2/.

If you would like flowers for the coffin and perhaps other flowers, we can recommend florists who will listen to you, find out about the person who has died and design beautiful flowers especially.

The vehicle to transport the person in their coffin to the funeral needn't necessarily be a traditional hearse – you may prefer a less formal vehicle, which can be hired or belong to a family member or friend.

You may want to pick a charity to which donations can be made, perhaps based on a special interest of the person who has died. It's a good idea to look for local charities.

It's wise to think fairly early on about a gathering after the ceremony, so a venue and catering can be arranged in good time if that's what you decide. If the funeral is at Riverstone people often

have the gathering after following the funeral and the cremation attended or unattended later or the next day.

Heart And Soul Funerals can provide you with information on all these choices. We will give you a summary of the arrangements you've made with us, along with a fully itemised estimate of costs, so you can make informed decisions that match what you have to spend.

Costs

Funerals cost money, there's no getting round it. The costs include burial or cremation fees, transport, a coffin, funeral director's expenses and so on. The average cost of a funeral is around £3,750 in Devon. Research has shown that family owned funeral directors like Heart And Soul Funerals are best value. If you're worried about paying the bill, talk to us at your first meeting and we can discuss the options. On the other hand, if money's not a problem, you can still spend it wisely on things that will make a real difference to the way everyone will feel afterwards.

You may leave out anything you don't want – such as costly limousines, perhaps, or an expensive gathering at a hotel afterwards – which you thought was expected. It doesn't matter what you believe others expect of you. Remember, this is your grieving ritual, created by you in your own family or community tradition and style, and everyone will respect that as much as you would honour another family's funeral arrangements. Death can bring people close, if you let it, you may be surprised at the genuine kindness people want to show you.

The day of the funeral

You will be looked after by the same person, Birte, Paul, Jane or Simon, right through the process from your first meeting to the end of the funeral. You will have their reassuring presence and support on the day to ensure that everything goes just as you want it to, leaving you free to do what you need to do. That person will not be involved in another funeral that day, so you have their full attention for as long as you need it. You can be as involved as you like in all aspects of the funeral ceremony.

Further ideas

You may like to look at our book, *We Need To Talk About The Funeral - 101 Practical Ways To Commemorate And Celebrate A Life*. It is full of ideas that may help you to find your own way to say farewell, with beautiful photographs and 101 short and accessible ideas to comfort, reassure and inspire. We lend this, and our unique collections of words, poetry and music, to all the families we support.

When things aren't as straightforward

This guide is an introduction to what you will have to go through when someone dies, and is not meant to be exhaustive.

Bear in mind that, occasionally, complications can happen. For instance, if the person died unexpectedly the emergency services must be called and the death will be referred to the Coroner. It can mean the person's body is taken away without warning, just at the time you may need to feel them close. It may even mean the funeral has to be delayed, although this is rare. Phone the Coroner, they are very approachable, or talk to us. No-one can change things, but at least they can be explained.

And if there's anything at all you need to be clear about, before or after the funeral, don't hesitate to ask. That's what we're here for. Our telephone number is 01803 840779 or 01364 643522 (24 hours).

After the funeral

Before the funeral, making the arrangements, calling people to tell them about the person having died, dealing with closing bank accounts and so on, can take up your attention and keep your mind off your immediate grief.

But after some time, when everyone else's life has gone back to normal, you may feel alone and out of the loop. People don't know how to talk to someone who's grieving, but you'll need them to. Tell them you want to, or they'll think you want to forget. We can offer help with coming to terms with bereavement. We offer you a free meeting with a bereavement counsellor who can help you to make sense of your feelings about your loss, and there are organisations such as Cruse and others who give support in grieving. The end of a loved-one's life is perhaps the worst thing that can happen, but it's not the end of everything, and your life will go on.

You will need to sort out probate, perhaps distributing possessions.

Heart And Soul Funerals are here to help you with all aspects of arranging a funeral and a funeral ceremony, providing you with the clear information and reassurance you need to make your own choices. One person will look after you from the first meeting, right through the process and will be there on the day of the funeral.

Heart & Soul Funerals



Award winning funeral directors
for funerals across south and central Devon

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