
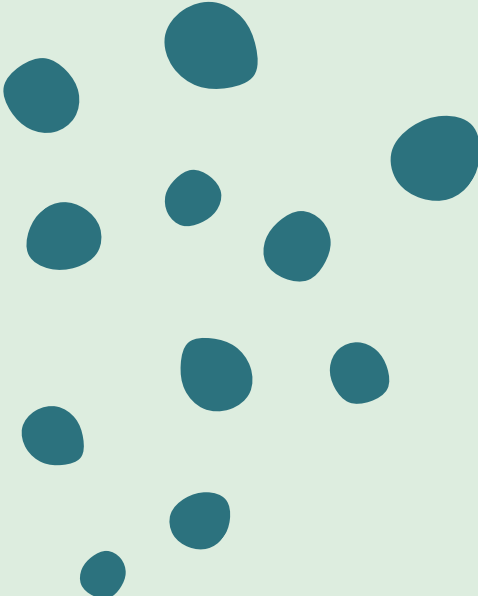


# What happens next?

## A FUNERAL GUIDE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

*This leaflet accompanies our book  
'Living after loss: A grief guide for young people'*





# WHAT TO EXPECT IMMEDIATELY AFTER SOMEONE DIES: PREPARING TO SAY GOODBYE AND FUNERALS

In this leaflet we share thoughts and practical tips from other bereaved young people; these may help you to decide on your own way of saying goodbye.

Young people often tell us they have a variety of feelings and thoughts about ways to say goodbye when someone important to them has died. Whether or not your person's death was expected, when it happens, it can still be a shock.

Following a death, as well as a range of feelings, there are lots of tasks that need to be done relatively quickly by the adults around you, such as registering a death and planning a funeral.

Some **cultures and faiths** (such as **Islam** or **Judaism**) believe a person's remains should be laid to rest as soon as possible after a death, so in some cases, there may be very little time after a death before the funeral takes place.

For some people, the 'busyness' of the period immediately after a death can cause their brain to shut out the worst of their grief reactions so they can deal with the things that need to happen. This is normal, but not always the case for everyone—even members of the same family can react very differently.

Your parent/carer and other trusted adults may be very busy for a couple of weeks immediately following a death, which can be hard if you feel you need their attention.

## PRACTICAL TIP

In the days and weeks immediately following a death:

- **Make time** each day to reconnect with each other after busy periods: a hug, family meal or just watching TV together can feel comforting.
- **Know it's ok** to still laugh or joke and have fun if you feel like it—grief is exhausting and it's ok to 'switch off' and think about or do something else.
- **Don't feel guilty** for not being sad all the time: that might be how we have seen grief portrayed on TV or in films, but real life is more complicated and varied.
- **Spend time with friends**—lots of young people tell us this can be both a distraction and a relief when everything else has been turned upside down, which is why heading back to school or college can feel safe and more 'normal'.
- **Spend time alone** if you need to. You might want to read, exercise, listen to music, scroll social media, watch TV, or game. Try to balance time spent alone with some time interacting with others: balance is good.
- **Remember**: faith and religion can bring comfort to many, but it's also ok to feel angry and frustrated that your person had to die. This anger can feel confusing if it conflicts with religious beliefs. Talk to family and/or your faith leader for more spiritual support.

# WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Whenever a person dies a qualified Doctor will need to confirm they are no longer alive and sign a death certificate.

Sometimes when people die the reason can be unclear, so their body may need to be examined in a hospital setting - if your family's religion allows for this - to establish a **cause of death**. Once this examination, called a **post-mortem** (Latin for 'after death') has taken place, the body will be released to **undertakers** so that families can begin to plan for a funeral and goodbye rituals, usually (but not always) through a **funeral home**.

If your person died suddenly or unexpectedly, there may need to be a further investigation into how and why they died, or who (if anyone) was responsible for their death. This would be ordered by the **coroner**, who would work with doctors and officials (such as police) to establish what happened to a person.

Once a cause of death is confirmed, families will then need to officially **register the death** with the registrar of births, deaths and marriages, so the family can then legally access their relative's will and private records, and sort out their personal belongings.

## Where will their body be taken?

Once a person's death has been registered, undertakers will come and collect the body and transport it to a funeral home; some families and faiths prefer to keep their person's body at home with them for a short while to see them for the last time and say goodbye.

A **Funeral Director** is the person at the funeral home who will support families as they make plans and decisions about a person's funeral.

Funeral homes also take care of a loved one's body whilst preparations are being made for their funeral. They will keep the body safe, cool, and preserve and prepare it for burial or cremation by washing and cleaning, then dressing the person as the family choose.

**Funeral technicians** may also add some makeup to help give a person's face the colour and appearance of how they were in life. This is done because sometimes family members would like to visit and spend time with their loved one in the **chapel of rest** during the short period between death and the funeral. See the next page for more information about making the decision to visit your special person after they have died.

# SHOULD I SEE MY SPECIAL PERSON AFTER THEY HAVE DIED?

Although not always possible—for many reasons—some families have the chance to spend time with their special person after they have died. They often tell us this time spent saying goodbye can be helpful and healing—different to a more public event like a funeral. It is an opportunity to talk to, look at, and touch your special person (if you want to) for the last time before they are buried or cremated.

Some **cultures and faiths** (such as **Irish Catholic** or **Judaism**) have traditions that may include holding a **vigil** (watching over, guarding, and praying) beside someone's body for the period of time between death and the person's body being laid to rest at their funeral. In this time friends and loved ones may come to see the person and pay their respects. It can feel intense and overwhelming for some, to receive lots of visitors at such a difficult time.

If you are offered the chance to see your special person (this might be in the hospital or hospice where they died, at home, or at a funeral home in the chapel of rest there), here are some things to consider when making your decision.

## PRACTICAL TIP

### Possible Benefits:

- The last opportunity to see them in person.
- Seeing the reality of death can help us begin to understand and process the loss.
- A chance to talk to them at rest and share your feelings privately.
- A chance to hold their hand/stroke their hair.
- A peaceful and private goodbye without onlookers.

### Things to Consider:

- They may look a little different to how you remember them in life.
- It might help to have someone describe what you'll see in the room before you enter to help prepare you.
- It's not 'like they are sleeping'—a body after death has no signs of life (e.g. warmth, breath, movement).
- The room will feel cool and so will your person.
- It may be an intense emotional experience for some.



REMEMBER, THE BEST CHOICE IS AN  
INFORMED ONE: THINK IT THROUGH AND DO  
WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

# SHOULD I SEE MY SPECIAL PERSON AFTER THEY HAVE DIED? (CONTINUED)

If you feel unsure about visiting someone after they have died, it can help to talk through the decision with someone who knows you well. If possible, another friend or family member could visit/go before you and share with you what to expect to help you prepare.

‘Make sure you know what you’re going to be seeing. Ask someone who’s already seen them to describe what it will be like. If it gets too much it’s ok to leave, you don’t have to feel any obligation to stay’  
15yo

## PRACTICAL TIP

If viewing your special person’s body after they have died:

1. **Take someone you trust** with you for moral support—they don’t have to go into the room with you but can be with and talk/listen to you before and after.
2. **Try to have something to eat or drink beforehand** to steady yourself: strong emotions and low blood sugar can leave people feeling lightheaded or wobbly.
3. **Plan a calming activity afterwards** to give yourself time to reflect and process before rushing into the next part of your day.

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# PREPARING FOR A FUNERAL: WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

## What happens at a funeral?

Funerals have 2 main purposes:

1. to lay a person's body to rest, usually through [burial](#) or [cremation](#).
2. to say final goodbyes, celebrate the person's life, and to perform any last [rites or rituals](#) that feel important to grieving families and friends; often there is a [wake/funeral reception](#) after the burial or cremation to allow family and friends to gather for some refreshments and to support one another.

[Cremation](#) takes place at a [Crematorium](#) and is the process where a body in its coffin is placed in a special fire that reduces the remains to ashes that can be scattered, kept, or buried. [The process is painless as a body can no longer feel hot, cold, or pain once the person has died.](#)

There are different methods and places people choose when laying the physical remains of a loved one's body to rest. They may be:

- Buried in a cemetery or graveyard (this may be attached to a place of worship).
- Buried in a green/woodland site: 'green' burials use fewer chemicals and resources and are kinder to the environment.
- Cremated and their ashes stored in an urn (a special container) at home.
- Cremated and their ashes scattered somewhere special.
- Cremated and their ashes buried in a chosen place.

## Should I attend the funeral?

Some families worry that children and young people might be too upset to attend a funeral and may try to encourage younger members of the family to stay away. What we know is that [it's important for young people to have choices](#) around which parts of goodbye rituals they want to be part of.

When your person's funeral is being planned, you should reflect and talk to your family and main carer(s) about the [ways you might want to be involved](#). This section will give you some ideas and things to think about when preparing for a funeral.

Wherever your person's remains are laid to rest, you may be able to go back and visit that place, but if you can't—or prefer not to—you [can always hold your memories of them in your mind and heart](#). Wherever they are laid to rest, there is nothing to stop you remembering them and loving them still.

'I had the option to go and I did. I wanted to go because I wanted to see a good send off and it's nice to know that they've been sent in a happy way. I saw it as being something that was nice for them and that they would have enjoyed. It helped me with accepting their death.' 15yo



# PREPARING FOR A FUNERAL: WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW? CONTINUED

## How can I be involved in the funeral?

There are many things young people have told us helped them feel involved in their person's funeral. Here are a few:

- Write a letter or card to go in their coffin
- Place a special object with them in their coffin (or one of a matching pair and keep one with you)
- Be a **pallbearer** (part of the team carrying their coffin into the crematorium or place of worship)
- Help choose music, pictures, poems or readings
- Say something in the funeral service

## Should I speak at the funeral?

Young people are sometimes asked if they would like to speak at a close friend or relative's funeral. Each person is different: some are very private and hate the thought of speaking in public; others would like to but feel nervous about doing so...

## PRACTICAL TIP

Deciding to speak in public can be nerve-racking at the best of times; try some of these ideas to help you prepare:

- **Decide** if you'd like to share an existing poem/quote/story/song lyrics (and choose them) or whether you would prefer to write your own tribute.
- **Write down** and practise what you want to say – record and listen back.
- **Practise** reading aloud with someone you trust.
- **Learn** some breathing strategies to help steady any nerves (see 'Section 3: What we know can help' in our accompanying book 'Living after a Loss: A grief guide for young people' for some suggestions).
- **Choose** a friend or family member stand beside you as you speak for moral support – could that person take over and read your words if you become overwhelmed?
- **Plan** an alternative: could a friend/relative, or the **funeral officiant** (official speaker or religious leader) share your thoughts on your behalf if you don't want to speak directly?

'I helped choose the music for Dad's funeral and I did speak – I am really glad that I did. I spoke about special, happy, funny memories of me and Dad that I wanted to share with others. It was hard not to cry and I was scared I would break down but once I started it was actually ok. I am really proud that I did it and don't regret it.' 15yo

# ATTENDING A FUNERAL: ON THE DAY

Funerals, whilst being sad by nature, can also be a source of great love, support, and often humour, which can feel surprising. You might hear funny stories about your person that help capture a sense of their personality, likes and dislikes, and individual quirks. Remembering who they were when they were alive is an important part of processing what they meant to us and what we will miss about them.

'Having somewhere quiet to escape to at the wake gave me some headspace. I was glad I practised a few phrases to respond to people's condolences, such as 'thank you for your kind words'.'

14yo

'I was surprised how hard it was to say goodbye and leave Dad at the crematorium. I wanted to stay longer.'

13yo

## How will I feel/react at the funeral?

Everyone reacts differently, and that's ok - funerals aren't always how they appear in films and on TV.

'I wasn't prepared for how I'd feel when the hearse arrived - I needed to hold hands with my sister to give me the courage to follow the coffin inside.'

15yo

'It felt weird to see how upset other people were – I felt bad because she's my Mum and I'm just sitting here quietly whilst everyone else is crying. I just had this heavy ache in my chest because I was holding a lot inside; I ended up letting this go and crying in the end. It helped it get out.'

14yo

'It was really difficult to write something to say at Mum's funeral – I found it hard to start. It's ok to use someone else's words if it's too difficult. I had so many memories and it was hard to sum up someone's life and how much they meant to you in a few words. Don't worry about big words or sounding smart or what others are going to think of it – it's about what YOU want to say: imagine you're saying it to your loved one privately, not in a big roomful of people, and say what's in your heart.'

16yo



# ATTENDING A FUNERAL: ON THE DAY (CONTINUED)

## PRACTICAL TIP

- **Talk through the plans for the day in advance** with your parent/carer: knowing the place, timings, where you will sit and what to expect can ease nerves. In some cases, you might be able to visit the place and meet the priest or officiant holding the service in advance.
- **Try to have something for breakfast**, even if you don't feel like it—low blood sugar can make an emotional day even more exhausting.
- **Pack** some water, tissues, your phone (on silent), some sugary snacks/an energy bar. Some people might want to pack wipes and deodorant as nervous sweating can make you feel more self-conscious.
- **Check in with loved ones** to see if they need anything: a cup of tea or a hug can really help. Thinking of others is a good distraction from your own thoughts, if you need a break from them.
- **Remember** that everyone at the funeral will have different experiences of your person and will express their emotions in different ways. It's up to you what you choose to share or express: **you don't have to feel or behave the same way as others—even those in your immediate family.**
- **It can be uncomfortable to witness other people showing their grief** openly if you're feeling very private, but it's a normal and important part of how some people might need to express their feelings.
- **Remember: the amount of tears you shed does not equal the strength of your grief or the size of your loss.**
- **Think about the last time you will see the coffin:** this is the last time you will see a physical presence of your person in this world. Prepare yourself mentally for this moment as **it can be hard to say that last goodbye.**
- **You might feel self-conscious** and/or unsure of what to say: **having a few phrases prepared can help**, e.g., 'Thank you for your kind words, we all miss [them] very much.' Or 'What is your favourite memory of [them]?'
- **Don't expect too much of yourself for the rest of the day:** funerals can be emotionally exhausting and it's ok to rest and switch off afterwards.

REMEMBER TO CHECK OUT OUR ACCOMPANYING BOOK  
'LIVING AFTER LOSS: A GRIEF GUIDE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE'  
FOR MORE IDEAS AND INFORMATION ABOUT COPING WITH  
GRIEF OVER TIME.  
AVAILABLE ON THE SEESAW WEBSITE.