

Doing it yourself: funeral factsheet

You do not have to employ a funeral director and may decide to take care of the arrangements yourself. This section outlines how to arrange a simple funeral without a funeral director, or only in part. Doing it yourself can be less expensive, but may take more organisation and work.

If the death is expected, it may help to start thinking about it and to plan ahead of time.

Care of the person who has died

A hospital or hospice can usually look after the person who has died for a reasonable period of time. If the person died at home, you must call a doctor, or call 999 if the death was unexpected.

If the death does not need to be referred to the coroner, you can care for the person at home. You can lay them out in a cool space, ideally for under a week, while you make funeral arrangements.

You can find out more detailed instructions on caring for a body at home on Pushing Up The Daisies' website: <https://pushingupthedaisies.org.uk/>

Some people instruct a funeral director to care for the body only. There would be a charge for this but it can be useful to use a funeral director's refrigeration facilities if there is nowhere cool at home or the weather is warm. You may wish to contact funeral directors ahead of time to see if they can do this and how much they would charge.

Registration and certification of the death

You must register the death and can't go ahead without the certificate for burial or cremation/certificate of Registration of Death (see <https://quakersocialaction.org.uk/we-can-help/helping-funerals/down-earth/practicalities-after-death/registering-death>).

Two doctors must sign and issue the cremation certificates – Medical Certificate (Cremation 4) & Confirmatory Medical Certificate (Cremation 5), except in Scotland or if a coroner has examined the body. A further form called an Application for cremation of the body of a person who has died (Cremation 1) must be signed by the next-of-kin, or the person arranging the funeral. Doctors, funeral directors or crematoria will have blank copies of these forms. You can also find them online at www.gov.uk/government/collections/cremation-forms-and-guidance

Down to Earth stories...

Following our guide, Michael went ahead with planning a simple 'DIY' funeral by arranging for his mum's body to be looked after at the hospice for a week while he arranged a faith leader, cardboard coffin and crematorium slot.

The full cost of the funeral came to around £1,200. Afterwards Michael said that it had been a tough but spiritually rewarding experience.

“A friend led a simple ceremony. The care home laid on tea and coffee afterwards and mum’s favourite cake was eaten in her honour. Those who attended said that it was one of the most moving funerals that they had ever attended.”

Arranging the ceremony

Information about prices and services offered by your local cemetery are often online, though you may have to call.

Some crematoria and council websites provide step-by-step advice to arranging a personal cremation without a funeral director.

You will need to fill in the crematorium's form, often described as an 'authority for the disposal of cremated remains'. They may also have a 'funeral instruction form', to include details of the person who has died, and your preferences for timings and music during the ceremony.

Buying a suitable coffin

The crematorium can offer guidance about a suitable coffin and personal items that can be put inside. Crematoria require coffins to be compliant with Government regulations on emissions and may ask that coffins are accredited by the Funeral Furnishing Manufacturers' Association or other authority. If you are looking to purchase a coffin yourself, there are a number of different options online, but it is important to check the crematorium or cemetery's requirements first.

Hospital mortuary staff may help you place the person who has died inside the coffin. If you have opted for a funeral director just to care for the person who has died, your coffin can be delivered to them.

Finding a minister, celebrant, or leading the ceremony yourself

You can ask a faith leader or any independent funeral celebrant (non-religious) to lead the service. The crematorium may have a list of local contacts or there are a number of online searchable websites. Or you or someone you know could prepare and lead the service yourself.

Transporting the person who has died

You can transport the coffin to the ceremony yourself with an estate car or van. Alternatively you can look for professional transport, such as through a funeral director or other company. A quick online search of 'funeral services' shows that there are several different and unique options available.

Burying a body on private land or in a garden

It is possible to do this, but there are certain rules that must be followed regarding paperwork, distance to types of water and the depth of the grave. You must have consent from the owner of the freehold of the land and burial of a body must not be prohibited in the land title deeds.

The Natural Death Centre also have resources on their website <http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk/> and can give advice on their helpline **01962 712 690** on doing some or all elements of a funeral yourself.

Find out more about Down to Earth at www.downtoearthsupport.org.uk