

What to do when someone dies

Your first call should be either to a Funeral Director or the police.

Who to call when someone has died depends on the circumstances of the death, and where the death occurred.

The most important step is to confirm the death and for an appropriate medical professional to ascertain the cause of the death. After this step, the funeral director of your choice can arrange transport of the person to their funeral home, arrange after-care and await your further instructions.

First call

In the initial interaction (usually a phone call) the funeral director is likely to want the following information from you:

1. The name of the deceased
2. The contact details of the primary contact
3. A time and venue to meet for the first discussion about funeral arrangements
4. Who has authority to allow the transfer from the place of death (see below)
5. Address details so they can arrange transfer of the deceased to their care
6. Questions about whether a doctor has been contacted to verify cause of death

They will then arrange for the transfer into their care, and perhaps a visit to a doctor for an evaluation of the cause of death.

First meeting with the funeral director

The funeral director will meet you at your home or in their offices at a convenient time to discuss arrangements - this is usually within 24 hours of first contact. The funeral director will offer a range of choices to suit your family's culture, customs and religious requirements.

Key decisions to discuss are:

- Who the decision maker is
- Burial or cremation, or other options
- After-care options and recommendations
- The funeral service itself

Before that first meeting there are some practical matters you may like to start attending to if you feel you can manage:

- Contacting the next of kin
- Contacting the Executor of the Will or the solicitor

- Start thinking about the kind of funeral you would like
- Gathering clothes for the deceased
- Thinking about whether you would like a viewing
- Determining the level of after-care you would like (and finding a suitable photograph)
- Finding suitable photographs for the service sheet
- Locating birth and marriage certificates

Who has authority?

One of the first questions a funeral director will try and determine is who has authority to make the after-care and funeral decisions for the person who has died. If there is a will, the executor usually has authority. If there is no will, or the will has yet to be found, the next of kin has legal authority. The next of kin may choose to nominate a family member to have authority on their behalf.

The courts have determined the following hierarchy in determining who is next of kin:

- Surviving spouse, Civil Union Partner or de facto partner
- Children of the deceased
- Parents of the deceased
- Brothers and sisters of the deceased
- Grandparents of the deceased
- Aunts and Uncles of the deceased