

Arranging a Child's Funeral

The funeral is the last physical act of caring for your child. It is a time, amid profound grief, when you can acknowledge your child and the meaning your child's life holds for you and your family. You have many choices in arranging the funeral. Arrangements for children and babies may be quite different from the way adult funerals are conducted. There are few legal requirements in arranging a child's funeral, although your religion or culture may guide you in your choices.

Selecting a funeral director

There are different ways to organise a funeral, although there is no legal requirement, most families choose to use a funeral director rather than take on the arrangements themselves. You may want to find someone who will spend time getting to know your needs and wishes and helping you arrange the service your way. A funeral director is there to help carry out your wishes. Family and friends may want to protect you by taking arrangements out of your hands, but in the end, the choice must be yours.

To bury or cremate

If you choose to bury your child, the burial must take place in an approved burial ground/cemetery. They may provide children's sections which, in general, maybe more comforting than others. Ask for cemetery guidelines about the tenure and fees involved. If you choose to cremate your child's body, there are no restrictions on what you do with the ashes. You might decide to bury the ashes or to scatter them. Or you may want to keep them at home with you.

Other children in the family

There are lots of ways in which you can include children in the arrangements for the funeral. Being involved helps both you and them to adjust to your child's death. If children are going to come to the funeral, it may be helpful to prepare them for what they might see and hear, before, during and after the funeral. For example, you can help them to understand that the people at the funeral express their sadness in different ways and that some of them may be crying and upset.

Be led by your heart, not by time

In most cases, time is an issue. If your feeling is to bury your child tomorrow, pursue that instinct, but if you feel you need more time – even two weeks more – this is not unreasonable. With time, you can make choices and change your mind if necessary. After a child has died you may feel shocked, angry, upset, numb and confused. It can be hard to take in what has happened, what it means to you and your family and what has to be organised. For many families it is the first experience of a death in the family. It can be frightening to think about what needs to be organised. The most important thing that we can say is take your time – don't rush. Do what you feel is best for you and your family. The choices you make now for your child are important now and in the future

Arranging the service

You may decide to hold the funeral in a place that has special significance for the family: at home, in a church or in a garden. Some people have services at the funeral directors, the crematorium or the graveside. Your choices are endless. You may choose a family member, friend, minister, chaplain or celebrant to conduct your service.

Flowers and alternatives

When choosing flowers, people may have quite different ideas: some prefer masses, while other prefer none. Some parents prefer cut flowers, while others prefer plants for their homes. Flowers may also be preserved as memories.

Other ideas

Involving the children's friends, to read, to sing, or to play an instrument at the funeral. There are endless possibilities: the important thing is that you create a service that meets the particular needs of you and your family.

Legal requirements

There are several forms you'll need to complete before the funeral. These forms, along with advice about funeral arrangements and the accompanying legal procedures, can be obtained from a funeral director or Cemetery Authority. For more information about funeral arrangements you could contact Red Nose Grief and Loss organisation.

The Death Certificate

The Extract of Death may not be automatically sent to you if your child was under 16 years of age. You can request an Extract be sent to you from the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages. It is free. If your child was 16 years or over, an Extract of Death is automatically sent to the person who completed the legal forms. A full Death Certificate can be obtained for a fee.

Cost

The funeral payment usually consists of three costs: the funeral director's service costs, the cemetery and crematorium costs and other miscellaneous costs, like the flowers, the minister or celebrant, the death and funeral notices in the newspaper. When arranging the funeral, be sure that you understand what costs you must pay. We know financial pressure is something many families experience. The amount of money you spend on the funeral does not represent the love you have for your child. Be mindful of your financial situation and discuss with the funeral director all options before making your selection.