

What to do after death : guidance

Introduction

When someone dies there are many decisions and arrangements to be made. The information aims to give simple advice and basic guidance about what to do after a death.

Death at Home

If in doubt, call the doctor or ring for an ambulance (999). If the death was unexpected or suspicious, contact the Police. You must stay with the body until they arrive. If the death was expected, and a doctor had recently seen the deceased, call them. The doctor will then issue a medical certificate, which will show the cause of death. If the deceased is to be cremated, let the doctor know, as they will have to contact a second doctor to confirm the cause of death.

The funeral director will get the doctors to sign the cremation certificates for which a charge is made by the doctors. This charge is called a disbursement and will be added to your invoice from the funeral director.

Death in Hospital

If the deceased died in hospital the hospital staff will contact the next of kin. The deceased will be kept in the hospital mortuary until collection of the body has been arranged. The staff at the hospital will advise on the collection of the deceased's personal belongings and on other formalities.

Death Elsewhere

If the death occurs away from home, the authorities in that area still complete the initial formalities. If the body is to be returned home for the funeral, then the funeral director can deal with all the necessary arrangements, including transportation of the deceased. If a person dies abroad the funeral director will advise on what options are available.

How to Register a Death

Please ask for the Register a Death Guidance handout.

The Police

If the death has occurred suddenly, or the death is unexpected or happened due to an act of violence or accident then the police must be advised. The Coroner will be notified in such cases. The doctor or Police will notify the Coroner.

The Coroner

When a death has been reported to the Coroner, he/she will investigate to establish the cause of death. The Coroner may ask for a Post-mortem to be performed. The Coroner will hold an inquest in cases, where death appeared unnatural, unexplained or due to violence or an accident.

Arranging the Funeral

Funeral directors will manage funeral arrangements and give advice and support. Check if the Funeral Director you choose belongs to a Trade Association. Do not make any funeral arrangements until you are sure that the death does not have to be reported to the Coroner, as this may affect the date when the funeral can take place. Find out if there is a Will as this may give specific requests for arranging the funeral.

Remember that if you arrange a funeral you are responsible for paying the bill. It is a good idea therefore to check how the funeral will be paid for and whether there will be enough in the deceased's estate to cover the costs.

The funeral director can arrange all aspects of the funeral service for you. Always ask for a written estimate of the total cost of the funeral so that you are clear on what has to be paid and for what. If the cost of the funeral is likely to cause financial problems this can be discussed with the funeral director.

What to do after a Death

DSS booklet D 49, provides detailed information and advice on everything that needs to be done following a death and procedures for administering an estate. DSS booklet BERE provides detailed information with regard to bereavement benefits. Advice can be given on how to reduce the costs and if applicable to claim assistance from the Benefits Agency Social Fund for funeral payments (claim pack SF200).